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DISCO DAN



OR,
The Twins of Poor-man's Find.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "CIBUTA JOHN," "SANDY SAM," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FALLEN CHIEFTAIN.

"Oh! I'm a dude, a daisy dude,
My style is the acme of fashion;
Oh! I'm a pet, as you can bet,
And my—"

BUT right there he came to a sudden stop, and exclaimed:

"Hold on! citizens, hold on! Don't get excited! I'm a pilgrim stranger here, but I'm white, clear through and through; so put away your tools of war and trip up here and take a drink at my expense.

"OH-HO! AND PRAY WHO ARE YOU, MR. COCK-SPARROW?"

"Come! One and all! Everybody come! I've got slathers of wealth, and I want to treat the whole house. I want to pay my footing, citizens, right at the start; for—

"I'm a dude, a daisy dude,
A sport of the very first water;
Oh! I'm a beau, I'd have you know,
And my—"

But he came to a sudden stop again.

"Whoop!" he cried. "Hold on, there, you Mister Big-man! Hold on! Don't get your back up, for I don't mean any offense, I assure you."

So sung and so exclaimed the hero of our story, on entering The Den, the most popular saloon at Domino Divide.

And now to describe him.

He was of medium height, and a splendid specimen of physical manhood, broad-shouldered and fair of face. His hair fell in a heavy mass upon his shoulders from under his fine "slouch" hat, and a graceful mustache adorned his lip. He was clad in a suit of seal-brown velvet, and sported a frilled shirt, a stand-up collar, and patent-leather gaiters.

He certainly looked the well-fixed sport he claimed to be.

He wore kid gloves, and carried a cane—a cane that was but little thicker than a riding-whip, and almost as pliable.

He was, perhaps, thirty years of age.

He had just arrived at Domino Divide, and had entered The Den Saloon, singing as above quoted, at the same time toying with his mustache and twirling his dainty cane between his fingers.

But the citizens did not seem to take to him over-kindly. Several of them reached for their weapons, and that was what caused the young sport to cease his singing and give utterance to the first exclamations set forth above.

At his invitation to drink, however, almost every weapon vanished, and the crowd surged eagerly forward.

When the self-styled "dude" began to sing again, though, he was suddenly confronted by a veritable giant of a man, who, with cocked revolver in hand ordered him to "dry up" instantly.

And then it was that the natty sport cried out: "Whoop! Hold on, there, you Mister Big-man!" etc., as quoted.

The big fellow was over six feet tall in his rough cowhide boots, possessed extraordinary breadth of chest and shoulders, and was large of limb in proportion. He looked to be a veritable Hercules, whom the average man would hesitate about "tackling."

His villainous face was broad and bloated, and bespoke a coarse nature and a passion for drink.

His nose was large and highly colored, probably a specimen of the art of The Den; while his eyes were small and blood-shot, and shone with an alcoholic gleam that added to his disagreeable appearance as a whole.

He was clad in greasy and dirty buckskin, and was armed to the teeth.

"So, ye don't mean no 'fense, eh, Mister Dude?" he bawled. "Wal, it's almighty lucky fer ye that ye don't!"

"It is, eh?"

"Yas, it is, eh! An' I don't want none o' yer guff about it, nuther! I'm th' Silver-tongued Cyclone o' Domino, I am, an' jest bear it in mind."

"Well, Mister Silver-tongue," said the velvet-clad sport, coolly, "there is no occasion for you to excite yourself, not the least in the world; so put away your shooter and come and join us in a social drink."

"Yas, that's th' idee, Cy, old pard!" cried the crowd. "Don't kick up no row!"

"You galoots, jest keep your heads shut!" the "cyclone" roared. "This heur are my funeral, not yourn!"

"But, my friend," the cool sport added, "we don't want to have any unpleasantness, I am sure. You had better put that barker away, now, and step right up and crook your elbow with the crowd. I came here to find peace and rest, after many exciting scenes elsewhere, and I hope you won't interfere. Was it my singing that offended you?"

"Yas, it war!" the giant asseverated. "An' not only that, but ye've 'sulted me; an' now ye want ter crawfish out o' it! No ye don't! I'm a roarin' whirlwind, I am, an' ye've got ter tackle me afore this heur crowd does any drinkin'. D'ye hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, but I cannot see in what way I have 'insulted' you. Please explain. I never like to get into a row without the very best of reasons for it. See?"

"Oh! yas, I see! I see, I does; an' you'll purty soon see somethin', too. I said ye've 'sulted me, an' so ye have! Ye've kinder insinuerwated that you're a better man nor I be, Mister Dude; an' by th' great gosh ye've got ter prove it! D'ye ketch onter that?"

"Well, yes, I believe I grip the drift of your meaning. Are you the proprietor of this saloon?"

"Naw, I ain't."

"Will you kindly inform me who is?"

"Thar he is, ahind th' bar."

"Yes," the man behind the bar added, "I am the proprietor heur sir."

The sport turned to the man behind the bar then, and asked:

"Is my presence here distasteful to you, sir?"

"No," was the answer, "it is not, sir."

"Do you object to my singing?"

"No, sir."

"And who is this gentleman?" indicating the giant "cyclone."

"His name is Red-eye Jim; or, at least, that's all the name I know fer him."

"Has he anything to do with the management of this saloon?"

"No, sir."

"Then why in the name of the seventeen wonders do you allow him to interfere with a stranger who comes here tending strictly to his own business?"

The big bully had remained very quiet for a moment, but now he suddenly broke out again:

"I'll tell ye why he 'lows it," he bawled; "it's 'causs he can't help it! I'm Red-eye Jim, th' Silver-tongued Cyclone o' Domino, I am, an' I'm th' king-pin o' ther hull burgh! Th' man that bucks ag'in' me bucks ag'in' somethin' solid, an' don't ye fergit to remember it. I'm the boss o' th' hull town!"

No one seemed to dispute the claim.

"Well, even if you are all you claim to be," said the sport in velvet, "you have no right to interfere with me, and you had better take a drop on it." And then turning to the bartender, he added:

"Bartender, set them up for the house."

"Bartender, don't you do it!" the giant ordered.

"I tell you to set up the drinks for the house!" the sport repeated.

"An' I tell him not to!" cried Red-eye Jim.

"Sorry, gent," said the bartender, "but I can't set 'em up till this here little diffikilty are settled."

The sport turned from him in disgust.

"Well," he said to the reigning terror, "you do seem to rule this roost, and no mistake."

"You kin bet yer life I do."

"And what is it you want of me?"

"I want satterfaction, that's what; an' I'm bound ter have it, too. You've 'sulted me, an' you've got ter suffer fer it. I want satterfaction!"

"Well, you're in a fair way of getting it," retorted the sport, and a dangerous light began to burn in his eyes. "But," he added, "if you must have a row with me, just wait till these gentlemen have had their drinks, and then I'll be at your service."

"Nary a wait! I've said thet no likker kin be h'isted heur till I've settled wi' you, an' I mean it! Now you jest git right down onto your knees an' ax my pardon."

The crowd was all attention, and every man held his breath in suspense. They certainly expected to see this "daisy" sport come to an untimely end, there and then.

He was armed to the teeth, too, as we have said; while the sport did not carry a weapon in sight.

If he was armed, his "tools" were well concealed.

The only thing the daisy sport had in hand was his dainty cane, and that he kept bending and twisting while he was talking. At the last words of the red-eyed bully the stranger's eyes snapped fire, and he cried:

"Why, you great, big, over-grown son of an octopus! What do you take me for?" And he glared straight into the bully's eyes.

This took the crowd completely aback. They fairly held their breath, now, in anxious silence.

"Wal, blast your impudence!" the "Silver-tongued Cyclone" howled. "Did ye hear that, citizens? Did ye hear what he called me? I didn't really mean ter plug ye, Mister Dude; but now, I'm a lunk-headed gorilla ef I don't shoot th'—." But he did not finish the sentence.

Just as he was about taking aim, with every appearance that he meant "shoot," the "dude's" cane darted out like a flash of light, and the little round ball on the end of it took the bully

squarely between the eyes, dropping him to the floor as cleverly as a butcher would fell an ox with a sledge.

The sport's cane was a loaded one.

"Now, gentlemen," the velvet sport said, unconcernedly, "call for your poison. I guess we won't have any further trouble."

Each man called for what he liked best, and when all were supplied, one of their number turned to the sport and asked:

"Pardner, what's yer name?"

"Well, citizens, my real name is Dan Dale, but of late my friends and acquaintances have taken to calling me 'Disco' Dan."

"Good ernuff! Pardns, heur's to Disco Dan, th' Daisy Dude o' Domino Divide!"

And the toast was drank.

CHAPTER II.

FUN IN THE DEN.

DOMINO DIVIDE was as flourishing a mining-town, considering its tender age, as could be found in all the great Northwest.

At the time of which we write it was perhaps two years old, and was in a thriving and prosperous condition.

Every citizen was well "fixed" in the way of the popular circulating medium—"tin," and several saloons and gambling-dens were doing a rushing business.

Foremost among these was The Den.

It was a saloon and gambling-house combined, and was owned and managed by one Barry Barleycorn.

Barry Barleycorn was a man who had evidently seen better days, and it was rumored that he had at one time owned one of the best and largest "palaces" in San Francisco.

Be that as it might, however, he was now simply what we have said of him—owner and proprietor of The Den, the most popular saloon at Domino Divide.

Barleycorn was a man forty years of age, perhaps, and was fairly well educated; but he had roughed it for so long in the wilds of "up-country" that he had unconsciously fallen into using the broad dialect peculiar to the West.

He had an assistant in the management of The Den, who "ran" the faro lay-out and looked after the gambling in general, while Barleycorn himself attended to serving the thirsty multitude.

The assistant's name was Karlo Kenton, or, at least, such was the "flag" under which he "sailed," and he was considered a solid man—which is to say, he was a man of nerve, and when he was around the saloon he managed to keep things pretty orderly and quiet.

He was a tall, dark fellow, and wore a heavy mustache. He always dressed in black broadcloth, his coat being long and buttoning high up, and he had won the not-very-appropriate name—"the Parson."

"But the 'parson' was anything but a parson, for a more profane sinner never crossed the 'Rockies' than he.

It was whispered around that the "parson," and not Barleycorn, was proprietor of The Den; but this was strenuously denied by both, and as though to convince the worthy citizens of their error, a sign had lately been put up over the door of the saloon, which bore the words:

"THE DEN."

BARRY BARLEYCORN, PROP'R."

So much in way of explanation.

Just as the crowd had "downed" the toast to Disco Dan, Barleycorn's assistant entered the saloon.

His practiced eye took in everything at a glance.

To see the crowd around the bar was no unusual sight; but to see Red-eye Jim, the bully and terror of the town lying stretched out upon the floor—that was something out of the usual order.

Red-eye Jim was acknowledged to be the best man in the Divide. He was a giant in size and strength, could fight like a tiger, and was never so happy as when in a row, and he actually ruled the town, as he claimed to do.

The citizens of Domino had long since learned that it was better and cheaper to let Red-eye Jim have his own way than to oppose him.

Kenton, the "parson," had once undertaken to put him out of The Den, before he knew him as well as he did a little later on; and Red-eye literally "cleaned out the ranch."

The "cyclone" was a bad man, and there was no gainsaying the fact.

Little wonder, then, that on this occasion the "parson" stopped short upon the threshold and exclaimed:

"Great Jupiter! Citizens, who laid out the 'cyclone'? Is he dead?"

"That is my work, sir," answered Disco Dan. "The man is not dead by any means, and will no doubt soon be up and howling for gore."

"Then you had better make yourself scarce around here, my friend," the "parson" advised; "for when Red-eye Jim comes to, your life won't be worth a tinker's wink. He is a bad man, he is, and you won't be anything in his grasp."

"Thank you for the advice," the cool sport responded, "but I prefer to stay and face the music. I do not scare worth a cent. I have laid the bully out once, and I have no doubt I can do it again, if necessary."

"Yes, but that is not the thing," the "parson" persisted. "Red-eye is a holy terror, and he will drill you on sight, and the best thing you can do is to slip quietly out of town while you have a chance."

"Yes, pardner, that's so," Barry Barleycorn added. "You'd better take th' 'parson's' advice, and slope."

"Nary slope," rejoined the sport, decisively. "I came here to stay. This Red-eye Jim may be the boss of this town, but he has no terrors for me. I'll see this thing out, gentlemen, if the heavens fall."

"An' bully fer you!" cried the man who had proposed the toast to the "Daisy Dude." "You're jest th' true metal, pardner, an' I, fer one, will stand by ye."

This man's name was honest Ben Bantam, the miner.

"An' so will I!" cried another miner, Billy Barber. "Fact is, Mr. Dan," he added, "this heur bully has been runnin' things his own way long enough, an' it's time he was sot down on. We've been talkin' this thing over for some time, we citizens has, an' we had almost concluded to go fer Red-eye in a body an' fetch him to terms. This has got ter be done sooner or later, an' there's always no time like th' present; so ef you want ter have it out wi' th' 'cyclone,' go fer him, an' we'll see thet ye have fair play. Hey, pardners, be I right?"

"Yes!" came the cry from a score; "right you are, Billy, an' we'll stand by ye."

"Well," said the "parson," then, "if that's the way you're going to fix it, all right; but I wouldn't like to see our friend here tackle the giant alone. He would be killed in less than no time."

"Now let me whisper once," spoke Disco Dan. "I thank you, citizens, for your intention to see fair play, but I do not want any of you to interfere. This affair is my own, and if Red-eye wants any more, I am ready to make him Black-eye. So far as I am concerned the fun is over now. I am not so fond of fighting as to kick up a fracas unnecessarily, but if your giant goes for me, though, I shall do my best to take care of Number One, you bet."

"Bully fer Disco Dan!" cried Ben Bantam.

Meanwhile Red-eye Jim had lain motionless upon the floor, with a purple lump upon his forehead as big as an egg, but now he began to show signs of returning consciousness.

He gave a groan or two, moved a hand, then his feet, gave another groan, and then opened his eyes.

For a moment he looked around in silence, evidently too completely astonished to speak.

He, the best man in the town, to wake up and find himself lying upon his back! It was beyond his understanding.

For a moment he was silent; then he partly raised himself upon his elbow, and gasped:

"W—w—what's the matter here?"

And in so simple and silly a manner did he ask the question that a roar of laughter from the crowd was the only response he got.

This had the effect of bringing back his scattered senses, though, and scrambling to his feet he fairly roared:

"What's been goin' on here? Did anybody see a mule kick me?" And as he spoke he felt of the lump on his forehead.

Then the crowd laughed the louder.

Never had they seen the bully in such a ridiculous plight.

"Curse yer ugly mugs!" the giant growled; "what're ye all a-haw-hawin' erbout?" And he glared around until his eyes rested on Disco Dan. Then he remembered the whole affair in an instant.

"Look out for yourself, sport," Kenton cautioned; "he's spotted you now."

Disco Dan had no time to reply, for, no sooner had Red-eye Jim espied him than he drew a bowie and sprung at his enemy.

"Ragin' tempests!" he screamed. "I'll slit—O—o—h!"

And, right there, with that cry of pain, he stopped.

He had drawn back his arm to plant the bowie in the sport's breast, when the loaded cane struck him on the knuckles with no gentle touch.

The ugly knife dropped to the floor, and the "silver-tongued cyclone," set up a howl that would have been a credit to a Piute brave.

The pain must have been intense, for it brought tears to his eyes.

"Oh! oh!" he howled, as he pressed his injured hand under his arm for one instant, and then the next instant jerked it up and down wildly, as though each finger had been badly burned, "see if I don't fix you fer this! You're mighty handy with that ar' dude cane o' yours, but you da'sn't meet me like a man an' fight this thing out fair an' squar'."

"That's just where you make your mistake," Disco Dan responded. "I dare meet you, in any manner you can name, my gentle walrus; but the fact is I don't want to. I did not come to this town to set up as a prize-fighter, and I want you to keep yourself to yourself. If you don't—Well, there will be occasion for mourning at your wigwam, that's all."

"Yas, but I won't keep off, an' don't ye fail ter make a note of it! You've carried this thing jest a leetle too far fer ter back out now, my penny doll; an' I'm a-goin' fer yer life's gore! I—O—o—h!"

He had pulled a big revolver, but ere he could use it the "dude's" cane had tapped him on the wrist.

The bully again howled loudly, and the weapon fell to the floor.

"I tell you," said the sport, "that you had better leave me alone. I am too many for you; and if you press me any further, I shall have to go for you."

The crowd enjoyed the fun immensely, and the laughter and jeers only served to urged Red-eye Jim on.

"Curse ye!" he cried, "I'll fix ye, cane or no cane!" And he made a blind dash forward.

But stopped suddenly.

Disco Dan touched him gently on the sore spot on his forehead, causing him to fall back.

"When you have had enough," Dan suggested, "just let me know."

"Curse ye," he cried, "I'll fix ye fer this! You're a coward, a coward! You're 'fraid ter tackle me fair!"

Disco Dan's manner changed in an instant.

"Lay aside your weapons," he said, "and I will do the same, and then we will see who is the coward. I have taken enough of your insolence; so now we'll settle who is chief."

Which was just what the giant wanted. Oh! Wouldn't he fix this velvet sport, though!

"I'm yer huckleberry!" he cried, and instantly he cast aside his belt and every weapon he had about him.

Disco Dan did the same, and removed his coat, and then the two faced each other in battle array.

"Be ye ready?" Red-eye asked.

"Yes, all ready."

"Then look out!" And with one bound the "cyclone" was upon the "dude," and instantly had him in his powerful grasp.

There was a brief struggle, and the giant swung the sport off his feet and raised him over his shoulder.

CHAPTER III.

THE "PARSON" AT BAY.

It was just as the crowd had expected.

Disco Dan was not man enough for the giant, and now he would most certainly be dashed to the floor and killed.

It was too late for any one to interfere, for a moment would end it all.

The crowd could only hold its breath in awful suspense and—wait.

But, somehow or other, the performance did not seem to go off exactly according to programme; at least, not according to Red-eye Jim's programme.

His intention was to raise the sport just so high, and then dash him to the floor with all his strength and kill him.

It was an old trick of the giant's, and he had performed it more than once.

But this time, as we have said, it did not seem to work.

He raised the sport up all right, but when it came to hurling him down there was a hitch in the proceedings.

Instead of stopping where the giant terror intended he should, the sport continued to go right on over his shoulder.

Nor did he stop until he had twisted himself

around and planted his feet squarely upon the floor—greatly to the surprise of the citizens, but more of a surprise for Red-eye himself.

A still greater surprise, however, was in store for about the time the sport's feet touched the floor, the "cyclone's" went up.

With a wonderful exhibition of strength the "Daisy Dude" raised the "cyclone" aloft, held him for an instant over his head, and then hurled him headlong through a near-by window, carrying away glass, sash, shutters and all!

Such a howl as went up from the crowd! It was simply deafening.

"Three cheers fer Disco Dan, th' Daisy Dude o' Domino!" shouted honest Ben Bantam, and with a will the cheers were given.

"Great hurricanes, sport!" exclaimed the parson; "what a holy terror you are! For clear grit and muscle you do just take the waffle."

"Th' waffle!" cried Barry Barleycorn, contemptuously. "Why, a waffle don't begin to meet th' requirements of this case! He claims th' biggest cake in th' hull durn bakery, an' th' one with th' most plums in it, too!"

"Ye might ruther say he takes th' hull 'stablishment, from chimbley-cap to suller-floor!" Billy Barber proclaimed.

And various other exclamations of similar import were heard.

"It was all done by a slight twist of the wrist," the velvet sport modestly explained. "I warned the big brute to keep away from me, but he would have it."

And the sport placidly put on his coat and hat, arranged his necktie and brushed the specks of dust from his clothes, and while thus engaged he added:

"Some of you had better go out and see to that chieftain. He may be in need of assistance."

Several men had already gone out, but now a great many more started with a rush, while Barleycorn took a lamp and went to the broken window, to throw a little light upon the scene; for, as perhaps we have neglected to state, it was night, though not very late in the evening.

There, on the ground, lay the fallen chief, flat upon his back, and senseless.

And he was a sight to behold.

The bump on his forehead swollen until it protruded like the nose of an anvil, his head was cut in a dozen places, from cruel contact with the glass, his face was covered with blood, and he looked as though he had been having a close-range struggle with a catamount.

"Say, Barleycorn," called out Ben Bantam, "jest pass us out a little likker, an' we'll see if we can't survive th' noble buck."

"To judge by his appearance now," Barleycorn responded, "I guess we're all likely to 'survive' him, Ben; but I'll pass out th' likker. Heur, somebody, grip onto this lamp."

The lamp was taken by a man standing near, and the proprietor of The Den hurried to the bar, soon returning with a glass of rum.

"Better a big sight let the rascal die, if he wants to," muttered Kenton.

"Oh, no!" protested Disco Dan. "That won't do! Bring the fellow in here, boys, if he is so badly hurt, and we will see what can be done for him."

Good advice. So, lifting the heavy form, the bystanders carried the giant around to the door and brought him in.

"Whar'il we put him?" they then asked.

"Lay him on the bar," the velvet-clad sport replied; and there he was placed.

And then the sport added:

"Were I a punster, I might be tempted to remark that 'Where this man found his beer in life, he finds his bier in death;' but as I am not a punster, and the man is not dead, it would hardly be appropriate for the occasion."

"Come, though, where is that rum? Let's see what we can do for him."

The liquor was handed to Disco, and he poured a little of it into the Cyclone's capacious mouth.

Little good it seemed to do, however.

"Hello!" Kenton presently exclaimed, as he espied a spot of blood on the man's shirt, "what's this?"

Disco Dan looked, and answered:

"I guess it is from one of the cuts in his face or head."

"It may be," the "parson" agreed, "but let's look and be sure." And as he spoke he opened Red-eye Jim's shirt and examined his breast.

For a minute or more he made a great show of examining the unconscious man, feeling for wounds, placing his ear to his breast, etc.

It would seem that he had suddenly become greatly concerned for the bully notwithstanding

that he had only a few minutes previously declared that the citizens might as well let him die if he wanted to.

Disco Dan watched all this narrowly, and when the "parson" was done, he inquired:

"Well, what did you find?"

"Nothing," the "parson" answered. "He has no serious wounds, and I guess in a short time he will come around all right." And he was about to turn away, but just then, to the great surprise of every one, the sport raised a handsome gold-mounted revolver and aimed it straight at his heart.

Where the weapon had been concealed, no one could tell.

"W-what do you mean?" Kenton gasped, starting backward a step and turning pale.

"This revolver says 'Hands up!'" the sport answered, calmly.

The "parson's" hands went up, though loud and bitter were his curses.

"What do you mean by drawing on me?" he cried.

"You hold your hands right where they are for a moment," was the sport's response, "and I will explain to the satisfaction of all."

"Citizens," he asked, "you all know that I am responsible for Red-eye Jim's condition, do you not?"

"Yes," was the ready answer; "but it war his own fault, sport, an' no one kin blame you!"

"That is not the point," Disco Dan declared. "The man is unconscious, and I am directly the cause of his being so."

"Now, suppose this man had a valuable gold watch, or a diamond stud, and—"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Barry Barleycorn. "Red-eye have a gold watch an' a diamond stud! Oh! Come now, sport, that's most *too good!*"

"I say *suppose* he had," Disco Dan repeated.

"Suppose he had something of value upon his person, and I detected some one stealing it from him. Would it not be my duty, seeing that I am the cause of the man's being helpless, to protect his interests until he revives? Would not that be the white thing to do?"

"It would, for a fact!"

"Bet yer life it would!"

"Then, sir," and the sport turned upon Kenton, "I demand that paper which you have just taken from this man."

The "parson" was pale, but he was perfectly cool and self-possessed, and he responded:

"I have taken no papers from him, sir."

"Then," responded Dan, "you make it necessary for me to tell you right here that *you lie!*"

The "parson" turned from pale to red, and exclaimed:

"Fellow-citizens, do you believe this? Have I not lived long enough among you for you to know me better? Do you take this stranger sport's word against mine? I say I have taken *no* paper from Red-eye Jim, and I defy my accuser to *prove* it! You have all been standing around me here, my friends; and did any one of you see me take anything? Of course you didn't!"

As no one spoke, it was evident that no one else had seen it, and loud murmurs were heard from among the "parson's" friends.

"I believe I am the only one who saw you take the paper," the sport averred: "for it was about as clever a piece of sleight-of-hand work as I ever saw. But, take a paper you did, all the same; and again I demand its return. I am bound to look after this man's interests until he can attend to his own affairs again, even though he *did* hunger for my blood."

"Again I tell you I did not take any paper!"

"And again do I tell you that *you lie!*"

It was an exciting moment.

Kenton stood helpless, the deadly revolver of the sport aiming straight at his heart, and the eyes of its possessor burning into his own, unflinchingly.

As for the crowd, every man looked on with terrible anxiety.

For a few seconds the silence was unbroken; then Barry Barleycorn spoke:

"See heur, sport," he said, "you must be mistaken. 'I've known Kenton heur fer years, an' a squarer man ain't ter be found in th' hull Nor'west than he.'"

"True, I *may* be mistaken," the Daisy Dude admitted; "but I have a few stray dollars down in my pocket which I am willing to stake on it, if you want to bet."

"Take him up, Barry," the "parson" quickly exclaimed. "You're sure to win! Stake every cent you're worth in the world!"

These words rather led the crowd to believe that the "parson" was innocent, after all; and many of the men were willing to bet high on it, anyhow.

"Durn my cats if I *don't* take ye up, Mr. Dude!" Barleycorn cried.

And as he spoke he produced his wealth in ready money to back his words.

"An' so will I!" called out several more of the "parson's" friends.

Disco Dan saw that it was now time for him to prove what he had said, and he exclaimed:

"Hold on! citizens—hold on! Don't risk your wealth, for you'd surely lose it. I have a sure thing."

And then to the "parson" he added:

"You said a short time ago, my friend, that I possess clear grit enough to entitle me to a ginger-snap, or words to that effect; and you have also defied me to prove that you are guilty of what I accuse you. Now, I think I have just enough clear grit in my composition to do it. I said you took a paper from this unconscious man's breast, and so you did. That paper is now hidden in the right sleeve of your coat, and, if proof is wanted—*here it is!*" And with a lightning-like movement, the sport thrust his fingers into Kenton's sleeve, and drew forth the document which he had seen him steal.

CHAPTER IV.

DISCO DAN'S PROOF.

It was a striking tableau.

On the bar lay Red-eye Jim, still unconscious, his head resting upon a cigar-box near the end of the board, and his feet reaching far down toward the middle.

On one side of this fallen gladiator stood Disco Dan, his gold-mounted revolver in his right hand, pointing straight at the "parson," while in his left he held up the paper which he had just plucked from the "parson's" sleeve.

Kenton was standing just behind the end of the bar, near Barry Barleycorn, his hands partly raised as he had been holding them ever since the sport had first "covered" him. His face was as pale as death, yet distorted with rage.

Barleycorn, standing near him, had his eyes fixed upon the paper, and his mouth stood open in mute surprise.

All around Disco Dan, and at the end of the bar, stood the crowd, the faces of all clearly showing the astonishment they felt.

For a moment silence reigned.

Disco Dan was the first to speak.

"Well, what say you, now?" he queried.

"It is a lie!" the "parson" burst out. "A foul, black lie! I did not take that paper from Red-eye Jim!"

"How came it in your sleeve, then?" the sport asked. "The sleeve is rather a peculiar place for a man to carry his *own* private papers in, is it not?"

"Citizens," Kenton cried, appealing to the crowd, "I tell you this is all a lie! That paper was not in my sleeve at all! It is a sleight-of-hand trick!"

Instantly the "parson's" friends took up the cry.

Disco Dan saw the game at once, but he had still another trump to play.

"Keep cool, gentlemen," he warned, "and I will yet convince you that it is no trick, as this man would have you believe. When he slipped this paper into his sleeve, it had a yellow wrapper on it; but now, as you see, it has none. Where, then, is that wrapper? It must still be in his sleeve, and I have drawn the paper out of it."

"I tell you it is all a lie!" the "parson" insisted. "Even if there is a yellow envelope or wrap in my sleeve, citizens, it is a part of this flash sport's trick. I am as innocent of the charge he makes as you are."

And so earnestly did Kenton declare his innocence, that half the men in the saloon began to believe he spoke the truth.

The "parson" thrust his fingers into his sleeve, as he finished speaking, and, sure enough, he brought out a large yellow envelope.

"What did I tell you?" Disco Dan exclaimed.

"And what did I tell you?" retorted Kenton.

"I tell you it is all a clever trick. I do not know what the object of it is, but I *do* know that this paper was put into my sleeve by the very man who now accuses me of stealing it. You have all known Red-eye Jim long enough, citizens, to know that he never carried any precious papers around with him, nor papers of *any* kind, for that matter. I tell you this is a put-up job."

"It is *not* a 'put-up' job, citizens," Disco Dan earnestly declared. "What I tell you is the truth, and I will swear to it."

"But can you *prove* it?" Barry Barleycorn asked.

"I *have* proved it!" Dan asseverated. "Did

you not see me snatch the paper from his sleeve? What more do you want?"

"The citizens of this little town want a *great deal* more!" the "parson" assured. "You claim that I took the paper from Red-eye Jim by a sleight-of-hand trick, and I claim that you performed a trick yourself in making believe to take the paper out of my sleeve. So far, it is about an even thing. But, my stranger sport, I am a citizen here, and am known; while you—you were never seen here before. It is not likely that your word will be taken before mine, is it? I think not!"

It was clear that Disco Dan was losing his grip.

He now saw where he had made his mistake in not forcing the "parson" to produce the paper, instead of taking it from him himself, as he had done.

But it was too late to correct that.

Ben Bantam, Billy Barber, and a few others still stood out for the sport, but the majority was for the "parson."

And the "parson" was not slow to take advantage of his chance.

"Furthermore, citizens," he cried, "suppose Red-eye Jim dies! How then? Who will be responsible? It will be this 'Daisy Dude,' as you call him! He will be responsible, and he has even acknowledged that he is responsible for the man's being where he is."

"Red-eye was a bad egg, citizens, we all know; but he was human, and the man who takes the life of a fellow being is—A MURDERER."

"And what do we do with a murderer out here?"

"Hang him!" was the prompt response.

"You're right!" the "parson" echoed. "And if Red-eye dies, it will be your duty to hang *his* murderer."

"An' we'll do it, too!" was the cry, as numerous weapons sprung to light.

"Hold on! citizens, hold on!" the sport cautioned. "Be careful how you handle your pop-guns, now, or I'll blow the whole roof off of this lying 'parson.' Red-eye is not a defunct yet, not by a long sight; and, even if he were, you couldn't hold me for it, for I only acted in self-defense."

"Too thin!" the "parson" muttered. "You urged him on, by putting on your airs and playing the dude around here, just like a bull is enraged when a red cloth is flirled before its eyes. More than that, you took him foul, anyhow. You were *behind* him when you lifted him up, and he had no show to defend himself at all."

"And how did I get behind him?" the sport demanded. "Did he not lift me over his shoulder? He had every advantage of me for a moment, but— Well, he hadn't the muscle to retain it, that's all."

"Now, citizens," he added, "I'll propose a plan to you, an easy way of settling this question, and one so perfectly fair and square, that no one can object to it."

"Wal, let's hear it," was the eager demand.

"It is simply this: Red-eye here seems to be coming around again now, and we will leave the question to him. If—"

"Yes," the "parson" interrupted, "but how do these citizens know but that you and Red-eye are partners in the game?"

"Pardners yer grandmother!" cried out Ben Bantam. "D'ye s'pose two pards would try fer to lambaste th' stuffin' out o' each other? Not much!"

"We can very easily settle that point, too," averred Dan. "I will retain the paper, and we will leave the yellow envelope lying here on the bar. Let not a word be said about it when the man comes to, and we'll see what remarks he will make when he sees it."

"This will be all the proof any one could ask. If he recognizes it as his, and inquires where the paper it contained is, then you will know that I am honest in the charge I have made. If he does not recognize it, ever after his attention has been called to it, and says it is not his, then I will forfeit one thousand dollars in hard cash as compensation for having injured our 'parson' friend's fair fame and feelings, and will haul down my colors and get right out of town."

"Is that not fair enough?"

"Jest ez fair an' square ez can be!" declared Ben Bantam.

And no one else could deny it, although the "parson" tried to raise still further objections.

Red-eye Jim was regaining his senses, and after a little more liquor had been poured down his throat, and some water dashed upon his face, he opened his eyes.

He glanced at the faces around him for a few seconds, and at length raised himself upon his elbow and exclaimed:

"Good heavens! citizens, has ther' bin a y'arthquake 'round heur?"

A roar of laughter followed.

"B' gosh a'mighty!" the "cyclone" cried, as he began to grasp the situation, "what's bin a-goin' on heur, anyhow? What be I doin' stretched out heur, like a corpus all ready ter be planted? Kin anybody solve th' mystery? Ef they kin, I'd like ter know."

"It is very easily explained," said Kenton, at once. "This flash sport here pitched you through a window."

The "parson's" idea of course was to set the "silver-tongued cyclone" on the Daisy Dude again, with the hope that the sport would kill him.

If he could bring this about, it would end all question about the paper; or at least it would destroy all proof of his guilt.

And not only this, but he would gain another and far greater point, which will be explained later on.

But Disco Dan was wide-awake.

He saw the "parson's" game at once, and resolved that Red-eye Jim should not be harmed until the question of the stolen paper was fully settled.

"W-w-what!" the bully cried out instantly, as he sat bolt upright. "What's that ye say? Threwed me out o' th' winder? Oh! I ruther guess not!"

"But he did, though," the "parson" insisted, "and no mistake."

"Oh! git out! You're jokin'!"

"Nary a joke! It came mighty close to being a bad joke for you, though, I can tell you."

"D'ye mean fer ter say thet that 'ar frilled-shirt-an'-choker-collar dude flung me outen a winder?"

"That's just what he did, and there's the very window to prove it."

The giant swung around and dropped off the bar, and the instant he beheld the shattered remains of the window, he bawled:

"Cyclones an' y'arthquakes! Did my carcass make thet 'ar hole? Did it, feller-citizens, fer a solid fact?"

And the answer from the crowd was:

"It did."

"Great tornaders an' whirlwinds!" the "cyclone" cried. "An' whar was I? What was I doin'? Did I fall ter sleep?"

"Oh! you were there," said the "parson," "but you didn't have anything to say. Fact is, Jim, you can't whip one side of this 'Daisy Dude'."

"It begins ter look so, b'gosh!"

"It is so. He's too many for you, and no mistake."

Kenton was trying to urge Red-eye on to another fight, but the terror had evidently had all he wanted of it.

"An' I wasn't asleep, eh?" Jim asked.

"No, not till you struck the ground outside."

"An' didn't nobody help th' sport any?"

"Not a bit."

"Look 'e heur, sport," turning to Dan, "be this heur th' real old grim truth?"

"I guess it is."

"Be it, feller-citizens! I 'peal to ye ag'in."

The answer of the crowd was the same as before.

"Then by th' great horned toad, sport, I give up beat! You're th' fu'st man thet ever laid me out in my life."

"Great ginger! Jim, you don't mean to say you take water, do you?" Kenton demanded.

"That's jist it, parson."

"Well, you're a fine one! I thought you had a little sand in you, but I guess it's all straw."

"See here, my man," put in the sport, "you need not try to urge another fight, for it won't work. If this man is satisfied to drop it, so am I."

"Yes," Kenton retorted, "I guess you're glad of the chance to get out of it."

"That's all right," returned Dan, "and it is no funeral of yours, anyhow."

"Course it ain't!" cried Red-eye. "I see his game; he wants me fer to tackle ye ag'in. He wouldn't object to seein' me killed, I know; but I've had enough. Oh! yes," as he happened to see himself in a looking-glass on the wall, "I've had all I want!"

"Come, one an' all," he added, "an' take a drink on it." And he led the way to the bar. "This heur is my first lost battle, b'gosh! an' I'll treat."

When he reached the bar his eyes instantly fell upon the yellow envelope, and snatching it up he thrust his fingers into it. Finding it empty, a loud curse fell from his lips, and catching up a chair he sprang toward Kenton like an enraged lion.

CHAPTER V.

THE DIFFICULTY SETTLED.

THE crowd had been waiting anxiously yet patiently for Red-eye Jim to discover the yellow envelope, and now their patience was rewarded and their curiosity gratified.

That Kenton was guilty of the crime which Disco Dan had charged him with, was as plain as day.

The action of Red-eye Jim had proven it, even before a word left his lips.

Almost at the same time he swung the chair aloft, though, he cried:

"Give back that 'ar paper ye've stole, Karl Kenton, or I'll brain ye whar ye stand!"

"I have stolen no paper from you," the "parson" answered; but the terror cut him short.

"Ye lie!" he shouted. "I had a paper in my pocket in this heur envelope, as you knowed, an' ye've stole it! No one else in th' den had any interest in that paper, an' no one else heur knowed I had it; so it *must* 'a' been you."

"Hand it over, now, or else I'll split yer head wide open. You hear me!"

"But, Jim, I tell you I have not got it. I—"

"Wal, ye know whar it is then, an' th' sooner ye produce it th' better. It'll take me only a second fer ter make cold meat o' ye."

"Let me warble once, right here," now interposed Disco Dan, who still took the precaution to hold his ready revolver in hand. "I know something about your missing paper, Mr. Red-eye Jim, and I am holding it for you, all safe and sound."

"Th' deuce ye be! Whar did ye git yer paws onto it?"

"One moment first," said Dan, "and I will explain." And then turning to the crowd, he asked:

"Are you now satisfied, gentlemen, that I spoke the truth?"

"In course we be!" shouted Ben Bantam and Billy Barber at once, and a large majority of the crowd agreed with them.

The proof was too clear to be doubted.

Kenton looked pale and shamefaced enough, but there was a cold, steel-like glitter in his eyes which foretold that he would seek sweet revenge.

"Well, I am glad you are at last convinced," said Dan.

"And now, Mr. Red-eye," he added, "I will tell you how your paper came into my possession."

"When some of the boys went out to help you after you had fallen through—"

"Hold right up thar now, sport," Red-eye cried, "an' tell yer story straight! Jest say 'after you throwed me through.' I own up beat, I do, an' I ain't goin' ter try ter git out of it. Go ahead now."

"Well," Dan repeated, "when some of the boys went out to help you after I threw you out of the window, your friend, the 'parson' here, made the remark that it wouldn't be any great loss to the town to let you go on and die, if you wanted to, and—"

"Oh! he did, did he?" snorted Jim. "Wal, that war kind o' the 'parson,' warn't it? Much 'bliged to ye, 'parson?' I'll remember ye in my dreams. I won't fergit ye, you bet!"

"But, sport, go on. It ain't the fu'st time th' 'parson' has wanted me fer ter pass in my checks, not by a long sight. He's got good reason fer ter want me out o' th' way. But, go ahead."

"Then when you were brought in and laid out on the bar," Disco Dan went on, "the 'parson' suddenly became greatly concerned about you. He opened your shirt and held his ear to your heart, examined you for wounds, and so forth, as tenderly as though you had been his dearest friend."

"Such a change as that aroused my suspicions, and I watched him like a hawk watches its prey. He continued his pawing around you for several moments, and then I saw him suddenly slip a yellow covered paper up his sleeve."

"That was enough for me, and I saw his game at once. You had a paper which he wanted, and he took this chance to get it."

"Now, I do not know anything about the paper, whether it is his or yours, nor whether it belongs to either of you; but, since I was the cause of your being unable to take care of yourself, I felt it my duty to protect you from being robbed."

"I exposed his little game and took the paper from him, but he denied it so strongly that my word and proof were doubted; so we had to wait for you to come to and settle the question for us."

"Want me ter settle it, do ye?" Jim queried.

"Wal, I jest kin, you bet! This heur paper

war in my pocket, feller-citizens, jest as th' sport tells ye; an' th' 'parson' has a big object in gittin' hold of it. I can't explain what his object is, but I'll tell ye thet he wouldn't let my life stand atwixt him an' th' dockymment, ef he had a good fair chance ter take it."

"That's all bosh, citizens," declared the "parson," trying to force a smile.

"Not a bit it ain't, pard!" retorted Jim. "An' if ye ever find me laid out cold an' stiff, an' this heur paper not in my pocket, jest call him to account. Ef he didn't do it himself he'll know who did, you bet!"

"Bosh! bosh!" the "parson" muttered. "There is a game back of all this, citizens, and it will all come out, sometime."

"That is just the way I begin to look at it myself," Disco Dan agreed.

"You jest bet thar's game back of it!" Red-eye Jim echoed. "Thar's game as big as a hoss. I— Yas, that's all right, 'parson;' no need ter wink yer optic and pull yer brows at me. I ain't goin' ter let it out. I wouldn't 'a' said as much as I have, if you'd acted half square, but ye didn't. What I war goin' ter say is, this heur paper is valuable to me, an' I wouldn't lose it fer quite a few o' th' dollars like our daddies used ter gamble on."

"And this accounts for your power as bully of the town, eh?" Disco Dan hinted. "I thought it strange that a man of the 'parson's' caliber would let you rule his roost as it is evident you have been doing."

"Wal, et *may* be thet that has somethin' ter do with it," the bully answered with a grin.

And then he added:

"But, pard sport, if ye're ready, I'll return th' dockymment to my inside pocket agin'. I feel safer when it's thar, you know."

Disco Dan was still holding the mysterious paper in his hand, and now for the first time he glanced at it more closely than he had done before.

It seemed to be a legal document of some sort, and on one side of it was the name—"Barton Baker."

"What is your name?" the sport asked.

"My name? Wal, I ain't heer'd it fer so long thet I 'most fergit, but I b'lieve it's James Jumper."

"And what's yours, 'parson?'"

"None of your business!" was the quick retort.

"His name?" queried the "cyclone;" "his name's Karlo Kenton."

"Yes, I have heard you *call* him that," remarked the sport, "but I thought he might have another one or two. No matter, though."

"Now, Mr. Red-eye, this paper does not seem to belong to either you or the 'parson,' but that is no affair of mine. I have saved it for you, because I felt it my duty to do so, and here it is." And the sport extended the document to its former possessor.

Red-eye put out his hand to take it, but, at that instant, the "parson" sprung between him and the sport, and snatching it, attempted to tear it in pieces.

Quick as he was, the "dude" sport's magic cane was far quicker, and with a lightning turn its heavy end struck the "parson" on the wrist, who, with a cry of pain, let the paper fall, and then a hard push from Red-eye Jim sent him staggering against the bar.

Red-eye quickly secured the disputed document, put it carefully away in his pocket, and advancing to Disco Dan, extended his hand, saying:

"Pardner, shake. I ain't got no hard feelin's to'rd you now, not a bit. When you fu'st kem in heur, I war jest pinin' fer a leetle excitement, an' I set out fer to have some fun wi' you. I had it, too; an' I got all th' excitement I wanted. But we'll let that rest. I give in beat, an' beat bad; an' I guess you're 'titled to wear th' crown. Ye've done me a mighty big favor, pardner, in lookin' out fer this heur dockymment fer me, an' now I'm yours till death. From scalp-lock ter moccasin, pardner, I am wholly thine. Shake!"

Disco Dan took the proffered hand, as he answered:

"Citizen, you're right. Whenever I find a fellow-being actually pining for a little excitement, and he wants me to give it to him, I do my very best to accommodate him. When you set out to have fun with me, I tried to warn you off; but you would have it, and so I made it as pleasant for you as I could. I am glad you are satisfied and willing to call it square. For my part, I have no hard feelings toward you, and therefore I take your hand."

"Thank ye, pardner, an' from this hour forth I'm yours to command."

"But, come! I b'lieve I asked ye all up to drink. Come! One and all and everybody! This heur is my treat, citizens, an' I want ye all ter come to time."

"Come, Barleycorn, old stockin', trot out th' best ye've got, an' plenty of it," and the bully slapped a handful of money down upon the bar. Everybody joined him except Kenton.

"Come, 'parson,'" Red-eye cried, "I mean you too! We'll d'ink an' call it squar'."

"I prefer not to drink," Kenton answered. "You and your 'dude' pard have put up a job on me to ruin my name here in town, and I am done with you. The time will come when these citizens shall see that I was not guilty of the charge; and as for you, Mister Dude!" the "parson" cried, as he turned away, "take care of yourself!"

"Thank you," Dan responded; "I feel perfectly able to do so."

The "parson" was walking away toward the corner where his faro table stood, but Red-eye Jim sprung after him, clutched his shoulder and swung him around, saying:

"Parson, see heur: Disco Dan now are my friend—my friend, ye onderstand, an' when ye threaten him, ye threaten me."

"Hands off!" the "parson" cried. "I warn you both to beware of me!"

"Citizens," he aided, "I am sorry so many of you are blinded by this false accusation, but the time will come when you shall see it in its true light."

Several of the "parson's" friends still sided with him, but most of the crowd now sided with the velvet sport.

The proof had been too clear to be doubted by any fair-minded man, and the "parson" was under a cloud.

"Wal, pards," said Red-eye Jim, when all had filled their glasses, "heur's to Disco Dan, th' Daisy Dude o' Domino Divide. He's th' fu'st man thet ever climbed me—Red-eye Jim, th' Silver-tongued Cyclone o' th' great Nor'west, an' ye kin jest set it down that he's a terror. He's got more hoss-power muscle to th' squar' inch than any other man I ever tackled. Heur's to him!"

"The toast was drank, and then, as the glasses were returned to the bar, Barleycorn said:

"By th' by, Mr. Disco Dan, 'I s'pose you'll settle for th' damage done to my place?"

"Well," responded Dan, "I hardly know about that. I came into your place in a peaceable manner and you allowed me to be set upon, so I think you should stand the damage yourself."

"Oh, no!" Barleycorn cried. "Not so, my friend. I shall look to you for payment for the damage done."

"D'ye mean that 'ar winder?" Red-eye Jim asked.

"Certainly."

"Wal, jest charge that to th' 'parson,' Barry. My friend heur ain't ez much to blame fer th' damage ez I be, an' I guess th' 'parson' won't object to settlin' it fer me."

Barleycorn bit his lip, while the "parson" fairly ground his teeth in rage.

"Whatever Red-eye's hold on them is," Disco Dan thought, "it is no slight one, I'll swear."

Just then a new excitement arose.

CHAPTER VI.

DISCO DAN DUPED.

THE life and soul of the Domino Divide was the "Poor-man's Find" Mine.

It was as rich a mine as could be found in that part of the country, and employed a goodly number of men.

This mine was the immediate author of the town's being, and it was likewise the town's mainstay and backbone.

Without the "Poor-man's Find," the town would never have had its being; without its support, the town would soon have ceased to exist.

This mine was managed and operated by one Barton Barker.

Barton Barker was a man whose face was not by any means indicative of a saint-like character.

He was a tall, finely formed man of powerful build, and was passably good-looking; but his eyes and mouth indicated a hard, cruel and wicked nature.

And such his nature was.

Few men at the Divide cared to cross him, and perhaps the only one there who ever had, was Red-eye Jim.

He seemed to hold the same power over Barker that he held over Kenton and Barleycorn.

Barton Barker and Karlo Kenton were good friends, and Kenton spent so much of his time

at the mine that it had been whispered around that he must have an interest in it.

But this was denied.

Nor did Barker claim to have any interest in it himself, beyond his salary as manager.

As the people of Domino Divide understood it, the mine was owned by a party in San Francisco who gave Barker full and complete control.

Whether this was true or not, the fact that Barker had full control could not be denied.

It sometimes happened that Barker would go away for a day, or a few days together, and at such times he always left Karlo Kenton in charge.

The two men were such close friends, though, that nothing was thought of this.

Like the "parson," Barton Barker also had a nickname.

He was called the "saint."

We have described the "parson" as a very profane man, and the "saint" was almost as bad in this respect as he.

In some other respects the "saint" was the worst of the two.

But, enough of description.

Barker usually spent his evenings at The Den, but on the night of which we write he was rather later than usual in making his appearance.

His coming at last, though, was the cause of the new excitement we mentioned at the close of the previous chapter.

He was not alone.

Instead, he led by the hand the most beautiful girl the town of Domino Divide had ever seen.

She appeared to be not more than sixteen years of age; her features were regular and clear cut, her complexion was a rich pink and white, and her hair fell, like a mantle of golden sunshine, almost to her waist.

She was attired in a neatly fitting suit of some dark and serviceable material, wore a neat and pretty sombrero—and, all in all, made a striking appearance.

In her right hand she carried a small violin.

Such an apparition as this caused no little stir in The Den.

The town contained but few women, and certainly none to compare with this new vision of loveliness.

Where had the "saint" picked up such a prize?

That was the question which at once presented itself to all.

As Barker led the girl forward into the room, a discovery was made.

She was blind!

Her eyes were closed, and from beneath their long lashes bright tears appeared and fell like glittering diamonds to the floor.

She was silently weeping.

"Bless my soul!" cried Barry Barleycorn. "Where did ye find her?"

"Ain't sne a little beauty?" the "saint" demanded, as he pulled the girl around to face the crowd. "Ain't she a daisy?"

"She is, for a fact," Barleycorn agreed.

"Where did you pick her up?" asked Kenton.

"Oh!" the "saint" responded, "she came to me by chance. She is blind, as you can see, and says she has lost her sister, who was always her guide and companion. She drifted along by the Poor-man's Find just as I was coming out, and I thought I would bring her right on down here with me. What do you think of her?"

"She's a daisy, just as you claim," the parson agreed.

The girl could be seen gently trying to release herself from the "saint's" grasp, but he held her so firmly she could not get away.

"What be ye goin' to do with her?" Barleycorn asked.

"Why, I hardly know," Barker replied. "She's homeless and friendless, and I guess I'll have to marry her."

"Please release me, sir, and at once!" the poor girl cried. "You promised to conduct me to a place of safety, where I could find rest. Where have you brought me to?"

And now she made a determined attempt to break away.

The "saint" still held her fast, though, and said:

"Not so fast, my little one—not so fast! You do not really know when you are well off. I can tell you it is a mighty big offer, if I offer to marry you, and you ought to be glad of such a chance."

The girl now wept aloud, and again begged to be set free.

"Let me go, sir!" she cried. "I took you to be a gentleman, when I heard your voice and

asked you to lead me to a place of safety; but I now know how mistaken I was."

Disco Dan had been standing a little in the background, but he now strode forward and faced the "saint," his eyes ablaze with indignation.

"Take your hand from that lady's arm, and at once!" he cried.

Instead of obeying, the "saint" sneeringly exclaimed:

"Oh-ho! And pray, who are you, Mr. Cock-sparrow?"

"Remove your hand, I say! I will not warn you again!"

"Indeed! And what are you going to do about—O-o-oh! Curse you, you have almost broken my wrist for me!"

"Yes, and I will break your head for you, if you lay one finger upon this unfortunate lady again!"

Truth was, the "dude" sport's loaded cane had played an active part once more, and the "saint's" right arm was for the time being entirely useless.

Dan led the girl away at once to the opposite end of the room, and placed a chair for her, telling her to rest there for a moment until he could provide for her in a better manner.

But in so doing, the sport almost came to grief.

But for Red-eye Jim, he might have been taken at a disadvantage; for when he turned around he saw Kenton, the "parson," just in the act of drawing on him, while Red-eye stood before him with a revolver already out and at full cock.

"Jest go slow, 'parson,' ef ye want to live out yer allotted number o' days!" the giant bully said.

"Hello!" cried Dan, "what means this?"

"Why, pard," Red-eye answered, "it means thet th' 'parson' heur was jest about ter draw on ye, an' thet I nipped his leetle game right in th' bud, that's all."

"Much obliged to you. And you, 'parson,' you had better take his advice and 'go slow.'"

"Good heavens! Red-eye, what is the matter with your face?" Barton Barker now cried out, for the first time catching sight of Jim's sadly-abused visage.

"Y'arthquake," Jim answered.

"What?"

"Y'arthquake."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Wal, d'ye see me?"

"Yes."

"An' d'ye obsarve that winder over thar—er leastwise th' hole in th' wal whar th' winder used ter be?"

"Yes, I see that."

"An' perhaps ye behold this gentleman, eh?" indicating Disco Dan.

"Yes, I see him, curse him! But, what are you driving at?"

"Wal, simply this: and the bully went through the motions of picking up an object, twirling about for a moment, and then hurling it headlong through the window, adding—

"Presto—change!"

This fairly brought down the house.

For a full minute the building fairly shook with the laughter of the crowd.

"Great Judas!" the "saint" exclaimed, as soon as he could be heard, "you do not mean to say that this sport used you up and pitched you through that window, do you?"

"That's th' idee, prezackly. He is jest real old greased chain-lightnin' on springs, he is, an' don't ye fergit it! He done it jest as easy as a big rat kin pick up his tail when he sees th' fambly cat come meanderin' round in his direction, an' say—'Git thar, Eli, er ye'll lose yer job!'"

"But, 'low me ter interdooce ye. Sport, this heur are Mr. Barton Barker, th' 'saint' o' Domino. Mr. Barker, this are Mr. Disco Dan, th' Daisy Dude o' Domino Divide. He's a rip-snortin' old he-hoss terror, he is; th' noblest Roman o' 'em all."

"And he got away with you, did he?"

"Don't I look as though somebody had been gittin' away wi' me?"

"Yes, you do; but I never expected to see a man of that caliber lay you out."

"Ye don't know him!" Jim cried. "Ye can't sometimes 'most always tell jist how big a load is in a gun by lookin' at th' bore. Take my advice, 'saint,' an' don't stir th' sport up. He's wuss'n a can o' dynamite when ye git him started, I tell ye."

"Well, he may have proved too much for you, but as soon as I can use my arm I'll see what he can do with me."

"Then you are not satisfied with what you have had?" Dan queried.

"No, I am not! I allow no man to meddle with my affairs as you are doing, and— *Hands up!*"

Without the slightest warning the supposed helpless hand came up with a revolver in it, and the sport found himself "covered."

"Pretty well done!" Dan exclaimed. "A pretty neat little trick, Mr. 'Saint,' and no mistake." And being fairly in the toils, he raised his hands as ordered.

"Wal, by th'—!" But Red-eye Jim got no further. He had attempted to step forward to the sport's aid, but the "parson" suddenly stepped to the fore and covered him.

"What do you think about things in general now?" the "parson" inquired, smiling.

"He laughs best who laughs last," was Disco Dan's reply.

"That's a true saying," responded the "saint," "and this is about the last laugh in the game, I guess."

"Don't be too certain of it."

The sympathy of the majority of the crowd was clearly with Disco Dan; but when the citizens pressed forward to help him, they found themselves held at bay by Barry Barleycorn.

Barleycorn, Kenton and Barker very evidently understood one another's "game" pretty thoroughly, and it looked rather dubious, indeed, for Dan and his new-found pard.

"Now," called out the "saint," "let every man who sides with me in this matter, step this way."

Of course he was sure of the support of every employee of the Poor-man's Find, and the number of men who crossed over to his side was by no means a small one.

Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim were soon bound, and then the "parson" said:

"Citizens, this festive sport had his turn, and now comes mine. I and my pard Barker will take charge of the prisoners, and we will try and convince you that this flash 'dude' is a man who is guilty of a dozen crimes. In him you behold no less a personage than MIDNIGHT DAN, the California road-agent!"

Had every person in the room been suddenly struck dumb, the silence for a moment could not have been more profound.

Could it be possible? Could this handsome, fair-faced sport be the notorious robber and murderer the "parson" had named?—the outlaw whose very name had become a terror to all honest men? Could this be he?

Only a moment the silence lasted, and then arose the cry of "*Hang him! Hang him!*"

CHAPTER VII.

A STAY OF PROCEEDINGS.

AN hour had not yet passed since Disco Dan had first entered The Den, although it seemed to those who had not been actors in the exciting and blood-stirring events of the evening, that fully two or three had elapsed.

Disco Dan was used to exciting adventure of all kinds, but here he had found it spread on a little thicker than usual.

And now this last dilemma fairly capped the climax.

It was the most serious of all.

To be accused of being a noted outlaw upon whose head a price was set, was not only terribly unpleasant, but it placed him in a highly dangerous situation.

Once let the crowd become fully aroused to the belief that he was really that man, and the chances were that a "neck-tie party" would be on the tapis in short order.

Already the cry of "*Hang him! Hang him!*" had been raised by the friends and followers of Barker and Kenton, the "saint" and the "parson," and it was being rapidly caught up by half the people in the room.

And then to that cry some one added:

"Yes, an' hang 'em both!"

Quite a little group of the more cool-headed ones, however, headed by Ben Bantam and Billy Barber, raised their voices in protest, and counseled their hasty fellow-citizens to go a little slow until they had some proof.

"What more proof d'ye want?" some one bawled. "Ain't we got th' bos's word fer it? Ef th' 'parson' an' th' 'saint' sez it's so, it must be so! We've got their word fer it."

"Yes," retorted Ben Bantam, "an' that's all ye have got, too. That don't amount to a row o' pins in a case o' this kind, whar it's life or death. We must have th' solid proof!"

"That's jest what's th' matter w' Hanner!" exclaimed Red-eye Jim. "What we wants is proof! Th' sport heur has showed ye th' kind o' stuff he's made of, citizens, an' I ruther reckon ye've found him ter be th' pure quill an' clear white. He's th' reg'lar-made article, an' I'm

willin' fer ter gamble high on it. Ye've all drunk his health, feller pards, an' this heur town ain't th' kind of a burg fer ter go off at half-cock on a question o' this sort. Ye jest want ter take Ben Bantam's advice, an' go slow about it."

"Sides that, what th' ragged old deuce be ye talkin' o' hangin' me fer? What have I been doin'? I've been a purty hard citizen, pards, I know; but by th' great peak o' Shasta, I kin swear I never done nothin' ye kin hang me fer!"

"You haven't, eh?" sneered the "parson."

"No, I haven't, eh!"

"Well, it seems to me you're too free and friendly with this outlaw to enjoy a clean bill of health for yourself."

"That's just where you hit the nail, every time!" agreed the "saint."

"Yas, but I wasn't no friend to th' sport till he did me a good turn by blockin' your leetle game, 'parson,' an' you know it, too!"

"Bosh! That was all done for show!"

"All bosh, was it? All done fer fun, eh? 'Parson,' ye're a fool! D'ye s'pose these heur citizens is goin' ter swaller sich a tale ez that?"

D'ye mean ter say I went through that 'ar winder fer fun? D'ye s'pose it's fun ter have my han'some face all mussed up like it is? You talk like a man made o' putty an' stuffed w' shavin's, you do!"

Disco Dan said nothing.

He was waiting to see which way the tide would turn ere he set his voice against it.

And the poor blind girl, meanwhile, sat where the sport had placed her, her mind a prey to many doubts and fears.

Well she knew that her friend and champion was in trouble.

The blind are always quick of hearing, and she understood all that was going on, almost as well as though she could see everything about her.

And it was for her that the sport now felt most concerned.

Would any one else there have the nerve to protect her?

He feared not.

Mentally he cursed himself for having allowed himself to be so easily thrown off his guard, and he tried to plan some means by which to regain her liberty.

But he planned in vain.

He could only wait and see what turn events would take.

The sympathy of the crowd, he had found, was as fickle as the wind.

When he had had it of the greater part of the crowd a few minutes ago, only a few stood by him now.

The "parson's" accusation had turned the tables completely.

And he—the "parson" with Barleycorn and the "saint," still continued to "hold the floor."

The "parson" had found time to give the "saint" a hurried idea in whisper of what had been going on, and it was clear that they meant to push this advantage while the time was ripe.

They had been at the mercy of Red-eye Jim long enough, and here was a chance to cast off the yoke for good and all.

So they reasoned; and here the reader will guess that the paper which Red-eye Jim held, was one which they had reason to fear and desire to possess.

Such was the case.

And, too, since Disco Dan had had that paper in his hands, and the "parson" had seen him glance at it, it would be safe to put him out of the way, too.

What the secret of that paper was, is the point upon which the plot of our story hinges.

It will be revealed in good time.

"It's no use, Red-eye," said the "saint," "for your story won't go down. We citizens have more than once talked about calling you to account, and now is the time for us to do it. We've got the dead-wood on you now, my boy, and you and your outlaw friend have got to stretch hemp. Am I not right, boys?"

"Yes! yes!" was the cry again. "Hang 'em! Hang 'em!"

Red-eye began to "turn a little pale around the gills," as some one expressed it.

Not so the cool sport, however.

He was as cool as a ton of ice.

"Great heavens!" Jim gasped. "You don't mean fer ter hang us w'out no trial, do ye?"

"That is fer the crowd to say," the "parson" answered; "and I fancy they will say yes."

"But, that ain't no fair! I've got a right fer ter have a good, fair an' squar' trial, an' so's th' sport; an' b'gosh we wants it, too!"

"See how he speaks for his 'pard,' too!" ob-

served the "saint." "Don't it show for itself, boys, that they're old chums?"

"In course it do?"

"And," the "saint" went on, "there's a reward for this bold Midnight Dan, dead or alive. You're not going to let that slip away from you, are you?"

"Not by a long sight we ain't! Git a rope, pards, an' we'll make cold meat of 'em in no time!"

"That's th' idee! Hang 'em! Hang 'em!"

The excitement now ran high.

Three or four rushed away to find ropes, while a dozen others advanced to lay hands upon the unfortunate prisoners.

Red-eye Jim was seized at once, but not so the sport in velvet.

He had given a sudden and powerful jump, and now stood upon the bar trying to make himself heard.

"Gentlemen," he said, as soon as he could be heard, "you are too hasty in this matter, and if you carry out your present intention, you will live to regret it. I am *not* Midnight Dan, the California road-agent, and I never saw this man Red-eye Jim in my life before I saw him here to-night."

"As I have told you, I am a pilgrim stranger here, but I am a white man, clean through and through; and it is your duty, as square and upright citizens, to investigate this case before you go to extreme measures."

"I have a right to a trial, and I demand one. Just let this thing rest until to-morrow, and then go about it in a business-like way."

"And give you the night to find a chance to escape, eh?" queried the "parson."

"Yes, that would be a fine thing to do," added the "saint."

"No, no!" yelled the crowd. "Let's string 'im right up now!"

"Hold on! Hold on!" cried Dan. "One moment, b'ys! How many here are in favor of giving me a fair trial?"

Instantly Ben Bantam and Billy Barber, with their little group of ten or a dozen, shouted back: "We are! pard, we are!"

"Then," cried the sport, "help me!" And he gave a sudden kick which sent Barleycorn's revolver flying out of his hand, thus delivering his friends from "cover."

And they instantly took advantage of the moment.

Drawing their weapons, they all sprung to the fore, and Ben Bantam cried out:

"Karlo Kenton an' Barton Barker, we're jest ez good citizens o' this heur town ez you be, an' we all demand a fair trial fer this heur stranger. What d'ye say?"

These law-observing citizens were only a handful, but they now held the "drop," and that was everything.

"But," cried the "saint," "he will get away!"

"Ef he does, let him. Ef he really is Midnight Dan, th' reward for him sez dead or alive; an' sence ye've got him alive, thar's no need fer ter make him dead. What's more, jest set it down fer gospel that if ye go fer ter hang him heur to-night, thar'll be blood spilt. Them's th' sentiments o' this crowd!"

"Bully fer you!" cried Red-eye. "You're a boss, Ben, fer a fact!"

The "parson" and the "saint" were beaten.

"Oh! well," said the "parson," yielding the point as gracefully as he could under the circumstances, "we do not really want to force this thing, of course. We are willing to have the prisoners locked up till to-morrow, and then we will give them a hearing."

"Of course," assented the "saint." "It's nothing to us, whether you hang them or not; but we thought it would be for the good of the town to do so. We'll lock 'em up, as the 'parson' says, and then we'll see how you feel about it in the morning."

"Never mind the ropes now, boys," he added, "we're going to keep them over till to-morrow."

"There," said Disco Dan, "that is more like it. Now, the question is where are you going to put us?"

"Where shall we put them, 'parson'?" the "saint" asked.

"How will Pete Hanner's old cabin do?"

"Just the place! Bring them on, boys."

"Hold on a moment longer," said Dan.

"Who is going to guard us?"

"Oh! we'll leave two or three men to do that. Don't let it worry you, for you won't get out, I guess."

"That's not the idea, though. I don't care to trust myself entirely to your men. I want two men from Mr. Bantam's party and two from yours. How does that strike you?"

"That's th' idee, prezackly!" cried Red-eye Jim. "Nobody kin object to that!"

Again the "saint" and the "parson" had to yield, and the four men being appointed, the prisoners were led away, the "parson" going along to see that they were securely bound.

Pete Harker's cabin was a small and deserted one on the outskirts of the town, and just the place to answer the purpose.

After a few minutes' walk the party arrived there, and then the "parson" set about making his prisoners safe from escape.

He tied their feet, and then bound their hands to a convenient pole at one side of the small room, thus making them doubly secure.

Then he proceeded to gag Red-eye Jim so that he could not speak.

"Hold on!" Jim cried, as he saw what was intended; "what's this fer?"

"To stop your tongue, of course," the "parson" answered, as he made the gag secure. "If you can't talk, you won't tell tales."

The "parson" had a wholesome fear that Red-eye might reveal his secret if left free to use his tongue, and hence his precaution.

"And now," he added, when he was done, "I'll relieve you of that paper;" and he thrust his hand into the pocket where Jim had kept it. *But, the paper was gone.*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "PARSON" FOILED.

THE "parson" was furious.

Where could the paper be?

Only a short time ago he had seen Red-eye Jim put it into this very pocket, but now it was gone.

Had the "rascal" destroyed it? Had he passed it over to Disco Dan? What *had* he done with it?

"Where is the paper?" he fairly thundered.

Of course Red-eye could not reply.

"Tell me where it is," the "parson" commanded, as he drew a knife. "Tell me, or I will cut your throat from ear to ear!"

"How can he speak with a gag in his mouth?" asked Disco Dan.

In his rage at being foiled the "parson" had not paused to think of that.

Quickly he loosened the strng which held the gag in place, and then repeated the demand to know where the missing document was.

"Wal, it are jist whar you won't git yer paws onto it, you kin safely gamble," Red-eye answered.

"Tell me where you have put it or I will kill you where you stand!" the "parson" cried, and he raised his knife in a most threatening manner.

"Hold on 'parson,' hold on thar!" and one of the two men chosen by Ben Bantam stepped up with a revolver ready for action, and with its "business end" pointed somewhere in the neighborhood of the "parson's" nose. "Let us have no trouble here, if ye please."

"What is it to you?" the "parson" demanded, roughly, but at the same time taking care to step back from the revolver's dark tube.

"We're sent here ter watch these two men," the man replied, "ter see that they don't get out o' this cabin, an' also ter protect them: an', by great, we're goin' ter do it!"

And he meant solid business, which the "parson" very plainly saw.

"You're right, my man," Disco Dan said. "This is not a trial, and no man has the right to interfere with Red-eye Jim until he is on trial."

"He's welcome ter search me, if he wants to," said Jim, but he won't find th' paper, I kin 'sure him o' that."

"Then where is it?"

"None o' yer biz. D'ye think I'm gettin' out o' order in my upper story? Ef ye do, ye're left, an' left bad, too." And then Red-eye Jim shut his mouth as though he intended never to open it again.

"It seems to me, 'parson,' that you are wonderfully interested in that paper," said Disco Dan. "Only a short while ago, in the saloon, you denied ever having seen it. It strikes me that your stories won't dovetail worth a cent. Just remember, guardsmen, this is further proof of your worthy 'parson's' lying, and of my catching him in the act of stealing the disputed paper from Jim."

"Oh, the dead-wood is on him, sure's fate!" Ben Bantam's two men exclaimed.

And the other two guardsmen could not deny it.

The "parson" bit his lips, but his quick brain instantly framed an answer.

"Yes, I *am* interested in that paper now," he said, "because I believe by it I can prove you to

be the man I have said you are. Just remember what I say, guardsmen, as proof that I am no liar, but that the paper was put into and taken from my sleeve by sleight of hand. When that paper is found, if it ever is, it will prove that this sport is Midnight Dan."

"That's whar ye lie!" cried Red-eye Jim. "I know what that 'ar paper is, parson, an' so do you; an' you'd better shut right up about it an' git out o' heur."

This was partly a threat, and the "parson" knew it.

"I guess ther dead-wood are jist about as fast onto th' sport ez it are onto th' parson, now," one of the "parson's" guardsmen remarked.

"You'll see whar it is," retorted Red-eye Jim, "ef th' 'parson' forces me on it. I'll bring th' paper ter light in a way he won't like, now I tell ye!"

"Talk is cheap," the "parson" sneered, as he put away his knife. "Since the paper is not to be had, though, we will have to push our case without it."

"I guess ye will, fer a fact!" And Red-eye laughed.

It was plain to Disco Dan that Red-eye Jim's threat was the cause of the "parson's" backing down so suddenly, after so much bluster; and it was also plain that the power Jim held over the man was of no trifling nature.

"The paper will come to light, Mr. Kenton," he said; "I feel certain of it. And if it does—Well—" and then he stopped.

"What do you mean?" the "parson" cried.

"I think you can guess my meaning, sir."

"Do you know what the paper is?"

"I did not have it in my possession for several minutes without glancing at it, at least."

Dan knew no more what the paper was, than the man in the moon. He was simply playing upon the "parson's" suspicions and fears—casting his fly to land a trout, as it were. He was now becoming interested in the mystery of the disputed document himself. All he knew about it was the name he had seen on it—"Barton Baker," and the fact that it seemed to be some sort of legal paper.

The "parson" was baffled all around.

He could not tell where the paper was, but he half feared that Red-eye had passed it over to Disco Dan for safe-keeping. Had the sport read it? Had Red-eye revealed the dark secret to him?

On the last point the "parson" felt sure that he was yet safe, as he had not seen the two men talking together, and feeling thus far secure, he meant to remain so.

With this idea in view, he again put the gag into Red-eye Jim's mouth.

As he had argued before—if the man could not talk he would not tell tales; and he meant to leave him in just that unpleasant situation.

When he had arranged the gag to his satisfaction, he said:

"There! now you may converse as much as you can, which will not be very much, I guess. I would search you both, but I guess it is not necessary, for you can never destroy that paper, if it is in your possession, with your hands and feet tied as they are."

"That is about the way it looks at present, Disco Dan admitted. "You have got me in a tight place, parson, as sure as you live. It has no terrors for me, however, for I have been in just such fixes lots of times."

"Oh! you have, eh?"

"Sure."

"And you always came out alive and kicking, I suppose?"

"Every time! I begin to think I have as many lives as a cat is said to have, and perhaps a dozen or so more."

"Indeed! Well, I fancy when you come to be tried to-morrow, Mr. Midnight Dan, you will find that your supply of lives has narrowed down to one."

"You think so, eh?"

"Yes, and that one will be choked out of you with a hempen neck-tie."

"Well, a man has got to die once anyhow, I suppose, so there's no use kicking if it is so ordered by fate. There's many a slip between the cup and the coffee-pot, though, or words to the same effect, you must remember; and you must not count on my being dead until you find I can't squirm."

"And we'll fix you so that you can't squirm, never fear."

"You might be mistaken, though, Mr. Kenton, for you can't always tell just which way the frog will jump till he jumps. Now, I have an idea that the name of Barton Baker may be mentioned, if this thing comes to trial."

Another thrust in the dark was this.

Disco Dan's only knowledge of any Barton Baker was his having seen that name on the now missing paper he had rescued and preserved for Red-eye Jim; and he mentioned it now only as a chance shot.

But the shot struck home.

The effect was a surprise, and proved Dan's suspicions that the hold Red-eye had upon the "parson," through the mysterious paper, was a powerful one.

Only the promptest kind of action on the part of the four guardsmen saved Red-eye's life.

For an instant the "parson" had staggered back, his face turning ghastly white in the light of a torch held by one of the men, by which this scene within the old cabin was lighted up, and then he snatched his knife from his belt and sprung at Red-eye Jim with the cry:

"Curse you, you have betrayed us!"

"Whoop! Go slow, parson—go slow!"

And the revolvers of the guardsmen were at his breast as he realized it.

"Stand aside, and let me at him!" he ordered.

"He has played the traitor."

"Stan' back!" the guardsmen ordered, his own men as well as the two chosen by Ben Bantam.

"He has done nothing of the sort, sir," said Disco Dan.

"Then what do you mean by saying that the name of Barton Baker—"

"Hold on! I said *Baker*, not *Barker*, my friend."

"No matter. What do you mean by saying that name will be mentioned at the trial to-morrow?"

"I said it *may* be mentioned."

"And how did you get hold of that name, if Red-eye has told you nothing?"

"Why, I saw it on that paper you are so anxious to get hold of—so anxious, in fact, that you stole it."

"Gentlemen, is any further proof wanted of this man's guilt of the charge I made? Have not his own words and actions proven him a liar? You are all my witnesses, and I shall call upon you to-morrow, if I am tried."

Karlo Kenton was fairly knocked out of time. "Fiends!" he cried. "Are you man or devil?"

"Oh! I'm man, every inch!" the sport declared. "And I'm a white man, too, clear to the core."

Karlo Kenton, as we have already said, was considered a solid man at Domino Divide, a man of nerve and grit; and now to see him so taken down by this stranger sport, with no other weapon than the tongue, was a matter of no little wonder to the men who saw and heard it.

It began to dawn upon the minds of even the two who were on the "parson's" side of the case, that there must be a loose screw somewhere, to knock the "parson" off his legs like the sport's words had done.

And the "parson" was not slow to see and understand that this impression was gaining hold, and that he must do something to turn the tide once more in his own favor.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "I see I can not easily trap you by my acting, Mr. Sport," he said. And then to the guardsmen he explained:

"You see, boys, I was playing off a little to draw him out; but he won't draw worth a cent. Midnight Dan is all nerve, and no mistake about it. I never heard the name he mentioned, before, but I thought I'd make out I had, just to see what the next move would be."

"Ha! ha! ha! I guess you all thought I was in earnest, boys, the way I jumped for Red-eye. How you did go for me! Is my acting really so good? I guess I shall have to take to the stage."

"Your acting is decidedly good, just at present," Disco Dan honestly declared.

"Pretty good, Mr. Outlaw Dan, pretty good; but it won't work. These men of Domino know me far better than they know you, and to-morrow I'll show you up in your true colors."

"I hope you will, for my true color is white—pure white."

"We shall see. Close your doors and guard them well, boys, for Midnight Dan is a prize of gold."

And so saying, the parson went out.

The four guardsmen soon followed, locking the door, and then the Daisy Dude and the "cyclone" were left alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SISTERS.

In the mean time, what had become of the poor blind girl whom we left seated in The Den Saloon when her friend, the sport, was led away a prisoner by the "parson" and the four chosen guardsmen?

For some minutes she still sat where Disco Dan had placed her, weeping silently and trembling with excitement and fear.

Now that her friend was gone, she dreaded each moment to hear the hated voice of Barton Barker again.

Him she feared, and well she might.

A villain was he, of the deepest dye.

But the excitement in The Den was running high, and the "saint" had seemingly forgotten the girl for the time being.

If the people of Domino had indeed laid hands upon the true Midnight Dan, they could well congratulate themselves, for few there were who had not suffered loss at his hands.

Shipments of gold to market, no matter how secretly made, were sure to be known to the highwayman; and it was very seldom that he failed to "collect toll."

That there was a traitor in the camp, seemed self-evident, and now that traitor was believed to be Red-eye Jim.

Discussing these points, and everybody talking at once, made of the saloon a perfect bedlam.

When it became a little more quiet, or at least sufficiently so for her to make herself heard, then the blind girl rose to her feet and said:

"Gentlemen, pray give me your attention for a moment."

In an instant every voice was stilled, and then the girl went on:

"As you can see, I am blind. I am perfectly helpless. Is there not some one here who will conduct me to a place of safety? to some place where I will be near some one of my own sex?"

"In course there is!" Ben Bantam quickly exclaimed.

He and Billy Barber, together with three or four others of those who had rescued Disco Dan from his immediate danger, were standing near the girl, and they still had their revolvers in hand.

"Don't you be too previous, my good fellow," said Barton Barker, as he stepped forward; "this young lady is under my protection, and I will take care of her."

"Oh! do not let him come near me! I am afraid of him!" the girl cried, as she drew back in affright. "Do not let him touch me again. Oh! if my sister were only here!" And sinking upon her chair again, the unfortunate girl sobbed aloud.

"Stand back, Bart Barker!" Ben Bantam ordered, as he brought his revolver up, "you have done enough for th' lady as it are. You've forfeited all right to be her protector, by bringin' her here. Why didn't ye take her to th' house of some one of us men who's got wives? Jest answer that! No, sir! This girl is goin' to my house, an' my wife will be th' one to take care of her."

"Yes, yes!" the girl cried; "take me to your good wife, sir!"

"That I will, never fear," Ben responded decisively.

And then he added:

"But what about your sister? Where is she? Is she dead?"

"Alas! I do not know," the girl replied. "But I must tell you my story, and then I hope some of you will go forth and search for her."

"D'ye mean ter say she's lost near heur?" inquired Billy Barber.

"Yes; it cannot be far from here where she fell."

"Fell? Where did she fall from?" Ben quickly asked.

"I will tell you. She and I set out this morning to come to this town. We started from a place called Bullion City—"

"Over twenty miles!" some one exclaimed.

"It was a long, long walk," the girl said with a sigh.

"As night came on," she continued, "my sister told me we were near our destination, and a short time later she said she could see the town."

"We were then high up on the side of the mountain, and in a place where the trail was so narrow that we could not walk side by side."

"My sister walked behind me there, with her hand upon my shoulder, and all the time cautioning me to keep close to the wall on my left, guided me by saying 'step, step, step.'"

"Thus we advanced for some time very slowly."

"My sister was describing to me what she could see, at moments when it was not necessary for her to caution my every step; and she was just counting the habitations of this town, when of a sudden she gave a scream, let go her hold on my shoulder, and then I heard her falling down, down."

Here the poor girl began to cry again.

"An' couldn't ye hear her after that?" Ben Bantam asked.

"No," was the answer, as soon as the girl could command her voice; "I could not hear a sound."

"When she fell, I could hear her crashing through the vines and bushes for an instant, and then all was still. Oh! so still!"

"I called her name again and again, but no answer came to me, and I was alone."

"Then I was blind indeed!"

"An' what was it that skart yer sister an' made her fall?" asked Billy Barber.

"I do not know. I listened attentively, but I could not hear a sound save the barking of a dog, and that was no doubt here in the town. It must have been something she saw."

"When I found that I was indeed left alone, I knew not what to do. I was afraid to move for fear of falling, and I knew not what danger was near."

"I stood still for some time, hoping against hope that I would hear my sister call me, but I heard her not."

"Edith—that was my sister's name, had so far described my surroundings that I had a pretty good idea of them, and at last I resolved to try to reach here and ask your help."

"Just before Edith fell, she had told me that the sun was about half an hour high; so when I started to come here it must have been almost dark."

"It was a slow and tedious journey for me, for I had to feel my way inch by inch."

"At first I was guided by the barking dog I mentioned, and later by other sounds which reached me from time to time."

"At last, after what seemed to me to have been hours and hours, I reached a place where I heard voices, and then I stopped and called for help."

"In a moment, then, the person who brought me here came to me, and I asked him to lead me to a place of safety. He promised to do so, and brought me here. The rest you all know."

"And did I not keep my word?" the "saint" demanded. "Are you not in a place of safety?"

"Yes, I trust that I am, now," was the cutting answer from the blind girl, "since I have found other protectors than you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the "saint" laughed. "Why, you talk like an angel! A girl who is found tramping from camp to camp in a wild land like this, and—"

"See here, Saint!" cried Ben Bantam, in hot anger, "you had better close yer head an' say less, now I warn ye. This gal has asked me for to protect her, an' I'm goin' ter do it. You hear me! An' I'm goin' ter protect her from insult as well as from injury. That's th' sort of a bumblebee I am."

Ben was fully aroused, and the lion in his nature was plainly seen.

Nor was he alone, for Billy Barber and several others still backed him.

Seeing that he was at a great disadvantage, the "saint" pulled in his horns—so to speak—with as good grace as possible, and drew back.

"Oh! take her, Ben, take her! I don't want her on my hands so bad that I'm going to fight for her; not much! I brought her here with the intention of having Barleycorn give her the best room he's got, while I got up a party to go and hunt for her sister. You see she told me her story, or that much of it, at least, as soon as I found her."

"Since she is so infernal dignified and touchy, though, I'm done with her."

"That's all right," said Ben, "if it was true; but I don't believe it."

"Come, miss," he added, taking the girl's hand; "pick up your box, an' we'll go."

"But, my sister," said the girl, as she rose to go. "Will not some one go and look for her? Can you not tell by my description where it was she fell?"

"Yes, we know jest about whar it was," Ben answered; "an' as soon as I take you to my house, we fellers will go right off to find her. Come on." And leading the girl by the hand he started toward the door.

But just at that moment appeared a new actor—or to put it more correctly, actress—upon the stage.

Another girl—the very counterpart of the blind girl, except that her eyes were wide open and flashing—suddenly entered the door, exclaiming:

"Tell me, gentlemen; have you seen my sister—a poor blind girl?" She—

She got no further.

"Oh! Edith, Edith," the blind girl cried. And she sprung forward toward where she had heard the welcome voice.

"Oh! Bessie!"

In an instant the two girls were clasped in each other's arms.

For several moments they stood thus, whispering words of endearment, and then the one named Edith asked aloud:

"How did you ever find your way here, Bessie?"

"I had to feel my way, sister," the blind girl replied; "or at least I did until I came where I heard voices, and then I called for help and was brought here."

"And who was it brought you here? Tell me, at once, so that I may thank him!"

"He does not deserve thanks, Edith."

"Not deserve thanks! How can you say that?"

"Because he has forfeited all claim to my gratitude by his gross rudeness."

"Indeed?" and Edith's eyes flashed fire as she glanced at those around her; and, instinctively it would seem, they rested for a moment upon Barton Barker.

"But," she quickly added, "we can freely forgive his offense, in our great joy at finding each other."

The "saint's" eyes had dropped when they met those of the girl, and for a moment a flash of shame mounted to his face.

"But, tell me, sister," the blind girl quickly interrogated; "what was it caused you to fall? and how did you escape? I feared that you were dead."

"What caused me to fall, Bessie, was nothing more nor less than a huge snake, which thrust its ugly head out from a crevice of the rocks right into my face, as we were passing along."

"The sight of the hideous thing frightened me so, coming so suddenly and so unexpectedly, that involuntarily I let go of your shoulder and sprung back a step, and in doing so I missed my footing and fell over the edge of the narrow trail and down into the gorge."

"I must have struck my head, for I remember nothing save the sensation of falling."

"When I came to, I found myself lying in a clump of bushes, unhurt; and after calling several times for you, and getting no reply, I started here to get assistance to find you."

"But, thank Heaven! you are safe!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ORPHAN'S STORY.

THE sisters looked very much alike. So much so, in truth, that any one would have taken them to be just what they were—twins.

And beautiful girls they were.

They appeared to be about sixteen years of age, and were certainly not more than eighteen.

Their features were clear cut and regular, their complexions were beautifully clear, and their hair was like sunshine itself.

The only difference that could be readily seen, was that one was blind.

The eyes of the other were like two stars, so bright and flashing were they.

"Well, ladies," said Ben Bantam, "come; I will conduct ye to my house, an' my wife will see to it that ye're cared for an' made comfortable, ye kin jest bet!"

"Yes, sister," the blind girl immediately explained; "this man, I wish I could see him! has been my protector, and he was just starting to conduct me to his house when you came in."

"I thank you, sir, with all my heart!" Edith exclaimed. "We will accept your offer, thankfully."

"Before we go, however, I would like to tell our story here, so that all may know who and what we are, and why we are here in this wild country."

"Are you all willing to have me do so?"

"Yes!"

"Certainly!"

"By all means, miss!"

These and a hundred other exclamations of similar import were instantly heard.

"My sister and I are twins," the young lady began, "and we came out here from Ohio."

"We are searching for our father, or for proof of his death, if he be dead."

"He came out here about fifteen years ago, when we were very small."

"His name was Barton Baker."

At hearing that name, Barton Barker, the "saint," was seen to turn deathly pale, and he grasped the bar for support.

The quick eyes of Edith Baker saw this, and she asked:

"Did you know Barton Baker, sir?"

"N-no," the "saint" answered, "I did not."

"I thought perhaps you had known him, as you started when I spoke his name."

"No, I never heard of him. I started—if I

did start—because that name is so nearly like my own. My name is Barton Barker."

"Indeed! Then it is little wonder that you started, for I fancy it would not be agreeable to you to be claimed as a parent by two helpless girls."

At this there was a general laugh.

"You need have no fears, though," the girl added, "for this photograph is sufficient to settle the question of identity." And as she spoke she advanced a step and held a photograph up before the "saint's" face.

The "saint" had regained his composure to a certain degree, but not sufficiently to prevent another start at this new surprise.

Again his face paled, and he faltered:

"I—I wish you would not direct your attention to me singly; I am not feeling well, and do not care to be bothered. I know nothing about any Barton Baker, as I told you. Please address the crowd in general."

"Pardon me, sir; I will do so. I have no desire to make myself disagreeable to any one, I assure you." And the girl turned again to the crowd.

"Is there any one here who ever heard of a man by the name I mentioned?"

No answer was given.

"Then," the girl continued, "as you have never heard the name, please take this photograph and see whether you ever saw the face."

The likeness was handed from hand to hand, but no one seemed to recognize the face, though every man in the room looked at it; at least every one save the "saint."

He had already seen it, though, and— But, there was one other who did not look at it, and that was Barleycorn. He had his hands in water when the card came around in his direction, and he allowed it to pass him unnoticed.

That might have been as much from carelessness as from design, however.

"It is most discouraging," the young lady said, when the photograph was returned to her. "For more than a year my sister and I have been continuing our search, and thus far with out success."

"I cannot tell why it was, but somehow I had hopes that here at Domino. Divide we would learn something concerning our father."

"But, I must give you our simple story, as I set out to tell it."

"Our father's name, as I said, was Barton Baker, and he came out here about fifteen years ago."

"Previously, he had been a merchant; but an unfortunate stroke of business swept away his capital, and he came here with the hopes of making a fortune."

"He left our mother and us with sufficient to live upon, and hoped, so our mother often told us, that within five years at most he would be able to return with wealth enough to begin life anew."

"But, five years passed, and he came not. And so passed five years more."

"We heard from him at regular intervals, and time and again did our mother ask him to return; but he was determined not to do so until he could return with wealth."

"I came here for a certain purpose," he would reply, "and when I have accomplished that purpose, I will return."

"He sent us money, and we were never in want; but at last our mother began to droop and fade, like a neglected flower."

"The last letter we ever received from father was full of good news."

"At last! At last!" he wrote, "I have found what I have been seeking. I have found gold, and gold in abundance! As soon as I can have my claim recorded and made secure, and can get my mine running, I will return to you."

"But the good news came too late. Our poor mother was broken down in health and spirits then, and a few months later she died."

"Then I wrote to father, telling him of the sad event, but we never heard from him again."

"Whether he is living or dead, we do not know; but we fear that he is dead. From what our mother told us about him, and from the kindly letters he always wrote, we feel certain that only death would have kept him from going home to us in our sad hour of need."

"We waited a whole year, and then we resolved to brave all dangers and come here in search of him."

"We sold everything, and came; and for more than a year we have been wandering from camp to camp, seeking a clew."

"We support ourselves by singing and playing the violin, my sister doing the latter; and we are hoping against hope, almost, that our search may soon be rewarded."

"I am sorry, gentlemen, that my unfortunate fall this afternoon hindered us from reaching here in season to entertain you this evening; but to-morrow evening we shall be pleased to do so."

"We generally remain for a day or two in each camp, in order to learn of any intelligence our inquiry may bring; and if any one of you should chance to hear anything concerning the man we are in search of, I hope you will inform us at once."

As the lady ended her story she made a graceful bow, and then she turned to Ben Bantam, ready to accompany him to his humble abode.

But the crowd was not quite ready to have the girls go.

"Hold on jest a minnit, miss," one rough-looking man said; and stepping up to the bar he laid his hat down on it, adding:

"Thar! feller galoots, that 'ar hat calls fer somethin' from every man in this heur room. An' thar's a starter!" And as he spoke, he dropped a piece of money into the hat.

In an instant every man present moved toward that hat, and one and all present put in something.

"Bully fer you!" cried the man whose hat it was; "bully fer you, ol' hat, every time! An' bullier fer th' crowd! But th' bulliest fer th' two leetle gals! An', miss," presenting his hat to Edith; "th' bullion is fer you an' yer sister. Take it."

"But, sir," Edith protested, "we have done nothing to earn it."

"No matter, miss; it are yourn anyhow."

"But if you insist upon my accepting it, we must certainly sing and play for you—one song at least—to give something in return."

Edith whispered to her blind sister, and she took her violin from its case, and then, tired as they certainly must have been, they sung and played. Their voices, full, rich, and mellow, rose together in perfect harmony, one in alto and the other in air; and with the perfect notes of the violin the saloon was filled with such melody as it ne'er before had known.

And the song the two girls sung was "My Old Kentucky Home."

While the song was being rendered every one present seemed fairly to hold his breath, so still was the room; but when the girls' voices died away, then the crowd broke forth in one wild discord of applause.

Nor did the applause cease until the girls signified that they would sing again.

Another song was sung, which was as heartily applauded, and then Ben Bantam said:

"No more to-night, boys, no more to-night; the ladies is too tired. Wait till to-morrow evenin'."

"Come, miss, take this heur wealth out o' Jake's old hat, an' then I'll show ye over to my house."

The girl emptied the contents of the hat out upon a table, and then began to gather it up.

But, strange as it may seem at first glance, she took no coin of larger denomination than one dollar, and when she was done, there still remained upon the table one "twenty," one "five," three "tens," and one fifty-dollar gold coin.

"Take 'em all! take 'em all, miss!" exclaimed the man whose hat had collected them.

"No," said Edith, firmly, "I cannot accept them. I thank you, gentlemen; but we make it a rule never to accept a coin of greater value than one dollar. If those of you who gave these will take them back and put a dollar or less in place of each, that we will take, but not a larger sum."

Protestations were useless, for the girl remained firm; so each of the coins was taken up and a dollar put in its place; each save the "fifty," and that found no claimant.

"And whose is this?" Edith asked.

No one replied.

"Well," she said, "we cannot take it, gentlemen, so I will deliver it to the proprietor of this hall, and the owner may claim it when he will."

And she gave the coin to Barleycorn.

Bessie, having put away her violin into its case, Edith took her hand, and then bidding good-night to their audience, the sisters set out with Ben Bantam.

Only a few moments had they been gone when Karlo Kenton entered, and the "saint" called him aside at once.

CHAPTER XI.

DARK SCHEMES.

"MAY I inquire your name?" asked Edith Baker, as she and Bessie followed Ben Bantam down the street toward his residence.

"Sartain, miss, sartain!" Ben exclaimed. "My name are Ben Bantam."

"Can you tell me the name of the man whom I addressed so directly in the saloon?"

"Yes; his name are Barton Barker."

"Yes, so he said; but do you believe that is his true name?"

"Wal, as ter that, miss, I can't say. It's th' only name I ever heard him called by, except 'saint,' which is a sort o' nick-name th' boys gave him."

"And what sort of person is he?"

"My own private an' candid opinion of him, miss, is th't he are a bad one. He is boss of a mine heur at Domino. He is a terror when he gits his war-paint on, an' I reckon I'll have to keep my top eye open fer him, after th' way I've crossed him to-night."

"But, say, miss, if your father war out heurabouts fer so long, an' ye heard from him once in a while by letter, I should think ye could find th' place whar them 'ar letters war writan' posted, an' then git some news o' yer dad. How is it?"

"That is a question we are asked wherever we go, and I should have explained that point while telling my story in the saloon; but it slipped from my mind."

"Our father's letters were dated at different camps, but were always post-marked from San Francisco; and in writing to him we always addressed him in care of Jameson & Smith, H— street, San Francisco."

"An' didn't ye go there to ask whar he was?"

"Certainly; we went there at once on arriving at San Francisco, but Jameson & Smith were not to be found."

"The place on H— street was a gambling palace, we discovered; but it had changed hands."

"Wal, it's ruther a strange state of affairs, anyhow!" Ben exclaimed.

"Yes, it is indeed."

Bessie, the blind girl, then spoke.

"Mr. Bantam," she said, "do you think any harm will come to that gentleman who first took my part in the saloon, and was was after-ward arrested?"

"No," Ben answered, "I reckon not. I don't think thar'll be any proof ag'in' him."

"Then you do not believe he is a road-agent, as they accuse him of being, do you?"

"No, miss, I don't. I believe he is an honest man, every inch."

"Who is this you speak of?" asked Edith.

"He is the gentleman who first protected me from the insults of that man who calls himself Barton Barker," Bessie replied.

"What is his name?"

"He says his name is Dan Dale," Ben Bantam explained, "but he calls himself Disco Dan; an' to that th' boys heur have added—th' Daisy Dude o' Domino Divide."

"I'm goin' down to th' cabin whar he is, afore I go ter roost, an' see that he's all right."

"But, why do they call him so odd a name?" queried Bessie.

"'Cause he's such a dandy sort o' sport," Ben replied. "But," he added, "heur we be, ladies, so come right in."

As he spoke, Ben opened the door of his cabin, or shanty, for real houses were seldom to be found in so young a town; and the two girls followed him in.

Ben's better-half was there, a pleasant-faced woman of middle-age; and when Ben told her who his proteges were, she welcomed them heartily.

She spread the table at once, and laid a substantial repast, of which the girls partook unsparingly.

When that was over, and while Ben was out, he having gone to the cabin where Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim were confined, Mrs. Bantam assisted Edith in mending her clothes where the bushes had torn them when she fell, and then she arranged a place for the girls to sleep.

The Bantam mansion consisted of three rooms, all on one floor, two of them being quite small, and the third a little larger. One of the small rooms was used for a kitchen, the other for a bedroom, and the larger one as the general living-room.

The regular bedroom was assigned to the sisters, and Mrs. Bantam made up a bed on the floor in the main room for her husband and herself.

By the time Ben returned, all these arrangements were completed, and soon after that Edith and Bessie retired.

"Where do I feel the air coming from?" asked Bessie, almost as soon as Edith had closed the door.

"It comes from the window."

"Must we leave the window open?"
 "Yes; the room is so small and warm that we will almost suffocate if we close it. I have drawn the curtain, though, and no one can look in."

"I do not know why it is," said Bessie; "but I have a strange foreboding—an apprehension that we are in danger. I wish the window could be secured. Can you not fasten the lower part and open the upper?"

"There is but one sash to it," answered Edith, "and that opens and closes by sliding. I will close it half-way—there, now it is all right."

When Bessie had been guided to her place, Edith put out the light and joined her.

"Bessie, dear," she said, "I believe I have found a clew to our father's fate."

"You have?"

"Yes; I think I have found one who knew him."

"And who is he?"

"The man who calls himself Barton Barker—the one who gave the fifty-dollar coin which I would not accept."

"And why do you think he knows something of our father?"

"Because when I mentioned father's name he turned as pale as death for an instant, and had to grasp the bar for support; and then, when I held father's likeness up before his eyes, I thought he would faint."

"And you say it was he who put the fifty-dollar coin into your hat for us?"

"Yes; I saw him do it."

"Bessie, if any man has ever wronged our father and us, Barton Barker is the man. I believe we are near the end of our search."

Bessie Baker's fear was not without good foundation.

When Karlo Kenton had entered The Den, shortly after the twin sisters had gone away with Ben Bantam, Barton Barker, the "saint," called him aside at once, as we said at the close of the last preceding chapter.

"Great Scott!" the "parson" exclaimed; "what is the matter, Char—"

"Hist, you fool!" the "saint" quickly cautioned. "How many thousand times must I warn you about my name?"

"Only a slip, pard; and no one heard it. But what is the matter? Have you seen a ghost?"

"No, I have not seen a ghost; I wish I had. I have seen real flesh and blood, though."

"Well, who have you seen?"

"I have seen two young girls who are looking for their father, and their father's name—was—BARTON BAKER."

"Good God!"

If the "saint" was pale, the "parson" turned paler still.

"But," he said, "they cannot discover anything."

"Do not be too sure of that," retorted the "saint." "They have a clew already."

"The deuce they have!"

"Yes, and I gave it to them."

"Thun—"

"Hold on, hold on; not so loud. I'll tell you how it was. I was standing there by the bar when she mentioned that name, and I thought my knees would give out and let me drop."

"You said there were two."

"Yes, but one is blind."

"Well, go on."

"Well, the other one noticed the start I gave, and went for me at once."

"I denied all knowledge of such a man, but hang me if she didn't push a photograph of him right under my nose."

"Oh! I gave myself dead away, sure."

"And what are we going to do about it?"

"In the first place, did you recover that paper?"

"No, curse the luck! I didn't. Pard, that paper has mysteriously disappeared."

The "saint" ripped out an oath that was enough to have put out the lights.

"Where has it gone to?" he demanded.

"I fancy Jim has turned it over to that sport."

"I tell you, Wal—"

"Look out! Who is slipping up on names now?"

"I meant to say 'parson.' I tell you what it is—we have got to play a bold game, or get up and 'git.' Which shall it be?"

"You mean give up our grip here? Never!"

"Very well, then, two things have got to be done."

"In the first place, Jim and that sport must die."

"You're right!"

"In the second place—these girls have got to be spirited out of this town to-night, and put where they cannot do us harm."

"You don't mean—"

"I mean that we will hide them away, and then— Yes, by heavens, a good idea! We'll force them to marry us."

"But, enough said. We're drawing attention."

CHAPTER XII.

DISCO DAN'S DECOY.

LET us now return to Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim, whom we left confined in Pete Hanker's old cabin and guarded by four men.

As soon as the "parson" had gone away, the guardsmen locked the door, and the "Daisy Dude" and the "cyclone" were left alone.

"Now, Mr. Red-eye," Dan soon whispered, "I suppose that you would like to have that gag out of your mouth, wouldn't you? You can't answer me, but I'll take it for granted that you would."

"Just see if you can pull this way far enough to reach me."

Jim "pulled" and the two prisoners found they could get their heads together very comfortably.

"Good enough!" Dan exclaimed. And he added:

"Now, Jim, if you'll say you won't shout out and let those fellows outside know what we're up to, I'll set your tongue free. Can you keep still? Give a grunt if you mean 'yes.'"

Jim grunted.

"Very well," said Dan. "Now, just put your head over this way again and let me get hold of that gag with my teeth."

Red-eye did as he was directed, and Disco Dan soon had hold of the gag, and then he began to pull.

Jim pulled too, and in a moment they had the satisfaction of feeling the gag give a little; and in a moment more it slipped out of its wearer's mouth and over his chin.

"Gol dast the'r ugly pictur's!" cried the "cyclone" under his breath, "ef I don't git squar' fer this, ye kin jest call me a seven-octave-B-flat liar!"

"But, my dear fellow," said Dan, everything bids fair for our being jerked hence with but little show for our money if we remain here."

"An' we won't stay heur! We must git out o' this heur fix, pardner, if it takes th' hair off."

"And I agree with you there. I have no desire to climb the golden stairs just yet, Jim; I've got work to do before I go."

"Now, I want to ask you a few questions."

"All right; fire away, pardner."

"Now, in the first place, neither of us can get out of here without the other's help, and what I want to know is this:

"After we do get out, are you going to work for me or against me?"

"I'm for ye, pardner, every time; sure pop!"

"Suppose I prove to be Midnight Dan, as they say I am, how will it be then?"

"It'll be jest th' same. I'll be yer lieutenant, er anything ye say."

"Then you do not hold any grudge against me on account of our fight?"

"What, after th' way ye kept that 'ar paper fer me? No, sir-ee! Not a bit!"

"By the way, Jim, what became of the paper? I thought the 'parson' would get it sure when he went for your pocket. What did you do with it?"

"Why, I simply didn't put it into my pocket. I jest made believe do so, but let it drap right down inside my shirt. I kin feel it down in my boot now."

"Then you thought he would try to get it again, did you?"

"In course I did! Why, th' 'parson' an' his pard, th' 'saint,' would almost give their right hands fer this paper, you bet."

"Why?"

"'Cause it's valuable to 'em. I tell ye, though, they won't git it while I kin kick. It jest makes my livin', this heur dockyment does; an' I wouldn't take a farm fer it."

"How does it make your living for you? I do not understand."

"Why, ye see I knows a leetle secret o' theirs, an' have got this paper ter prove it; an' as long as I kin hold th' paper, I kin make 'em 'pony up' th' ducats. D'ye savvy?"

"Well, yes, I begin to catch on, Jim. I don't suppose you would take me in as a partner to work the claim with you, would you?"

"Would you deal square?"

"Of course I would. And it would be a good thing for you, too; for it looks to me as though

these men are about tired of you, Jim, and mean to cut you down in your prime. It is a wonder they hadn't done it before."

"An' they would, too; but I jest made myself a holy terror 'round heur, an' kept my eyes wide open, an' they didn't like ther job o' tacklin' me."

"And they'll be all the more determined to do it now, won't they?"

"I reckon they will."

"Well, if you take me into the secret as your partner, it will put you on more of an equal footing with them. As it stands now, they are two to one against you."

"Yes, that's so. But say, are you Midnight Dan?"

"No, I am not. I'll swear to it, if you wait me to."

"Then who be ye?"

"I'm Disco Dan; a roving sport who lives by his wits."

"An' ye'll deal square?"

"Yes, I will."

"Then I'll let ye come in fer shares, pervided ye kin figger ter git us out o' this mess."

"Oh! I haven't the least doubt but we can get out of here, but we must wait until the town becomes quiet and the citizens are asleep. You've got plenty of time to tell me your story."

"I ain't goin' to tell ye no story, though, pard; I'm jest goin' ter give ye th' cue to th' racket."

"Well, give me that, then. I don't suppose I need care about the full history of the case."

"No, there's no need ter tell ye any more than that."

"Ye see, all that's necessary is ter go to th' 'parson' or th' 'saint,' an' tell 'em if they don't fork over ye'll blow out on that little H—street affair in San Francisco."

"They'll pony up then, you bet!"

Could Red-eye Jim have seen the sport's face just then, he would have been startled by its expression of exultation.

He would have believed that Disco Dan was really something more than he appeared to be.

And in truth he was.

"But, Jim, suppose they corner me down to prove what I know, what shall I say then?"

"Why, jest say 'Barton Baker' to 'em, an' see how they'll take that."

"All right, I will. And now we're pards. I'm to back you, and you're to back me, through thick and thin."

"Jest so. An' now s'pcse we try an' git loose."

"All right. First of all, though, what sort of pole is this we are tied to?"

"Why, it's only a pole that Pete used ter hang his skins an' blankets on. It's only stuck into hole," Jim answered.

"Then take hold and we'll see if we can't get it out of one hole by pushing it further into the other. Are you ready?"

"Yes, all ready, pard."

They exerted their strength on the pole, but failed to move it.

"Try it the other way," Dan whispered.

They did so, and this time with success. The pole slipped further into the hole nearest Disco Dan, and Red-eye Jim's end came entirely out.

"Bully fer you!" Jim cautiously exclaimed.

"What's th' next move?"

"Well, I'll hold the pole steady, and you see if you can't slip along toward the end of it and get free."

Dan held the pole as steady as he could, and Red-eye squirmed along toward the end of it.

It was not an easy task, for his hands were secured to the pole; but inch by inch he worked along, and at last the cords that bound him slipped off at the end of the pole.

"Heur I be, pard," he whispered, as soon as he was thus far free.

"Good enough!" Dan responded. "Now see if you can get your hands loose entirely."

The rope had plenty of slack now, where it had been around the pole, and the "cyclone" found but little difficulty in getting his hands free altogether.

"Heur I be!" he cried, joyfully, "as chipper as a bluebird! They're goin' fer to hang Red-eye Jim to-morrer, be they? Wal, I ruther reckon they won't!"

"Hist! Not too loud!" Disco Dan cautioned.

"Do not spoil it all, Jim, when we are just on the point of success."

"No, ye're right. I'll be a leetle more keeful how I shoot off my mouth."

"Now, I reckon you'd like ter be sot free, wouldn't ye?"

"I certainly would, Jim, and no mistake."

"Wal, I'll see what I kin do fer ye, then."

Red-eye stepped around behind the sport, and

was soon at work at the cords that held him fast.

"There's a knife in my pocket," Dan whispered. "Get it out and cut them."

The knife was soon out and opened, and the sport's release quickly followed.

Both being free, they put the pole up in its place again, so that they could retreat to it in case any one came in; and then they began to figure on getting out of the cabin when the time came for them to act.

There was a window on each side of the door, and one of them having no shutter to it, the prisoners could look out.

They could see and hear the four guardsmen, who were near the door, and at first glance escape seemed impossible.

While they stood there they, and the guardsmen as well, were astonished to hear a sudden burst of music float out upon the evening air—music the sweetest they had ever heard.

CHAPTER XIII.

RED-EYE SURPRISED.

THE music that Disco Dan, Red-eye Jim and the guardsmen heard, was the song the twin sisters were then singing in The Den Saloon.

"Great peak o' Shasta!" one of the guardsmen exclaimed; "it must be angels!"

"Guess it are, fer a fact!" the others agreed.

And then all were silent as death, eagerly listening—charmed.

And as the girls' voices rose and fell in perfect time and harmony, the four men with one accord began to move away, step by step, toward the point whence the sweet sound came, and ere long they were lost to sight in the darkness.

Even Disco Dan found the spell hard to break; but seeing what an excellent opportunity was afforded for immediate escape, he shook Red-eye Jim roughly by the arm, to recall him to his surrounding danger, and said:

"Come, Jim, come! This is our chance to escape. We will not get another such opportunity in a hurry! We can get out here through the window, though. Come! out you go!"

"All right, pard, out I goes fer a fact," and Red-eye put one leg over the sill, thrust his head out, and in a moment more was safely outside.

Disco Dan quickly followed, and together they hurried away from the scene.

All things end, and the song was no exception.

And then as the guardsmen listened to the wild burst of applause which followed it, one of them remarked:

"I'd give my boots to be thar, boys, you bet!"

"An' so would I!" each of the others echoed.

Another song followed, as we have shown, and when that had died away the guardsmen suddenly remembered their prisoners.

"Come!" one exclaimed, "we'd better be gettin' back thar to th' cabin. How th' doost did we git away up heur anyhow?"

"Hanged if I know," another replied; "but, ez you say, we'd better git back thar."

The guardsmen returned, and one of them tried the door; but, finding it all secure, they all sat down on a bench at one side and talked.

After a time Ben Bantam came strolling down to where they were, and he asked:

"Well, boys, how's yer pris'ners?"

"Oh! they're all safe an' sound," was the reply; "d'ye want ter see 'em?" And the speaker rose up, ready to open the door.

"No," replied Ben, "no matter; I thought I'd come down afore I went to roost an' see thet all was O. K."

"Yes, everything is O. K., pard, an' we'll see thet nothin' happens."

"Of course," said Ben, "you'll take care that th' men do not get out; but I want to warn you to be jest as keerful about lettin' any one git in. We don't want ter find dead men heur ter-morrer, an' there's some in this town who wouldn't stop about makin' 'em so, ef they got th' chance."

"Oh! we'll be keerful, you bet!"

"All right, I hope ye will. I thought it best ter mention this, ter put ye on yer guard."

"Good-night."

Ben Bantam then returned to his domicile, and the guardsmen resumed their conversation.

Meanwhile, Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim had moved quietly but rapidly away to the outskirts of the town.

When they thought they had gone far enough to insure their safety for the time being, they came to a stop, and Dan said:

"So far so good, Jamesy, old boy."

"Sure's ye live!" Red-eye exclaimed. "An now what's ther next move on ther programme?"

"Well," replied Dan, "the first thing we want to do is to recover our tools of warfare. I saw that bartender put them in a closet behind the bar, and I suppose they're there still. I must have my revolvers and my cane, or I am not worth shucks, and, I guess you would like to have yours, wouldn't you?"

"Wal, yes, I reckon I'd feel a little stiffer in th' back, pard, if I had 'em in my belt; but, how be we goin' ter git 'em?"

"We must go into the saloon and take them."

"Holy smoke! ye don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do."

"But, Pard Dan, they'll drill us so cussed full o' holes thet our bleed will all leak out!"

Dan laughed.

"You do not understand me," he said. "I mean that we must enter the saloon after it has closed for the night, and steal our tools."

"Oh! now I savvey!" Jim exclaimed. "That's a hoss of another color. Yes, we'd orter be able ter git 'em that way, I reckon."

"Does any one sleep in the saloon?"

"Yes, Barleycorn sleeps thar, an' right ahind th' bar, too; but he's like a log when he gits settled down ter 'poundin' his ear,' an' I guess he won't trouble us, ef we're kinder quiet about it."

"We've got to risk it, anyhow; so let's work around that way and take a look at the ground. If we don't get our weapons before our escape is discovered, we'll be in a bad fix."

The two men moved cautiously around to the rear of The Den, and there they concealed themselves in the deep shadows and waited for the time to come for them to act.

In about an hour the saloon closed, and shortly afterward all the lights were put out.

Half an hour or so longer the two watchers waited, and then they approached a broken window and listened.

A sound greeted their ears that, as Red-eye Jim defined it, was a cross between the sound of a buzz-saw and the bray of an ass.

It was Barry Barleycorn, snoring.

"That's Barry," the "cyclone" whispered.

"Now, who's fer it, you or me?"

"I will go in and get them," Dan replied, "and you will stay here and give me the tip if any one comes around."

"All right. Give me yer foot an' I'll boost ye in."

The broken window had not been closed up, Barleycorn evidently feeling secure, sleeping behind the bar with a brace of revolvers under his head; and the velvet sport found no difficulty in getting in.

Once inside the room he advanced to the bar with the greatest caution, and was soon behind it.

A little careful search discovered the closet that Dan was in search of, and he soon had it open.

To his great satisfaction he found that his cane and revolvers were still there, as were also the weapons belonging to Red-eye Jim; and taking them up one by one he deposited them about his person, and then retreated to the window.

Barleycorn did not once break off snoring, and Dan's escape was easily made.

"Where's my tools?" Red-eye Jim asked, as the two drew away from the vicinity of the saloon.

"I've got them all safe," Dan replied. "Let's get away from this spot as soon as we can, though."

Jim muttered his dissatisfaction, but followed the sport all unsuspecting until they had gone quite a distance away from any building, and then all of a sudden he found Dan's hand upon his shoulder, and a revolver pressing against his head.

"James Jumper," the sport said, sternly, "you are my prisoner."

"What?" Red-eye gasped, in genuine alarm.

"I say that you are my prisoner!"

"An' who be you, anyhow?"

"I am—"

But we are not quite ready to disclose our hero's identity.

Suffice it to say that his reply caused Red-eye Jim's knees to knock together, and a groan to escape his lips.

"What d'ye want me for?" he asked.

"I want you to give me a full account of that affair in the place on H— street, San Francisco."

If ever a man was badly scared, that man was Red-eye Jim.

"W-what affair?" he gasped. "I don't know what ye mean."

"You know well enough what I mean."

"Pard, I swear—"

"Hold on, now; don't do anything of the kind. I've got the deadwood on you, and you know it."

And the sport added something that instantly brought the "cyclone" to terms.

"I cave, pard," he said—"I cave. I give ye my word, though, honor bright, that I didn't have nothin' ter do with that job."

"You didn't?"

"No, I didn't!"

"Who did do it, then?"

"It was a pard o' mine as done it, an' he's dead."

"And who was that 'pard'?"

Red-eye mentioned a name, and then Disco Dan said:

"If what you say is true, you are in no danger. Now, I want you to tell me everything you know concerning this case, from the very beginning down to date."

Red-eye proceeded to do so at once.

A long conversation followed, and at length the two men came to a perfect understanding.

"Now," said Dan, "give me that paper which you say is in your boot."

Red-eye sat down at once and pulled off one of his boots, and the paper was soon in Disco Dan's possession.

Dan then restored the "cyclone's" revolver and knife to him, and then together they started down the street toward the lower end of the town, where Red-eye had a small cabin.

They had only proceeded a short distance, though, when they heard voices, and saw the dim outlines of some men coming in the opposite direction.

"Some fellers is comin' this way," Red-eye whispered.

"So I see," responded Dan. "Let's get out of sight."

And he quickly drew his companion back behind a slab shanty that was near at hand.

The sound of the voices drew near, and in a moment more four men stopped right in front of the very shanty where the sport and his man were concealed.

CHAPTER XIV.

SURPRISE AND MYSTERY.

AS soon as the four men stopped in front of the shanty, one of them asked:

"Well, cap'n, what's our orders fer ter be?"

"I will tell you," was the reply, and the voice was unmistakably the voice of Barton Barker, the "saint;" "and I want you to pay close attention to what I say."

"All right, cap'n."

"In the first place, I want one of you to go down to the other end of the street, and, at the end of ten minutes, whoop and howl and fire off your revolver until you arouse the whole town."

"What th' doost be that fer?"

"I will tell you. You must be quite a little distance away from the jail when you begin, and the guardsmen at the jail will at once rush up to see what is the trouble; and—"

"In course they will! S'pose they take it inter the'r heads ter slug a feller full o' cold lead, too; how then?"

"Ah! there is not much danger of that. You can play off drunk, you know."

"All right."

"Then, as soon as the jail is left unguarded, I want the other one of you to climb into the old cabin through the broken window, and, with your knife, kill both prisoners."

"Do you understand me?"

"Yas, cap'n, we onderstands ye well enough; but this heur are goin' ter be a mighty resky job."

"Not much risk about it at all!" the "saint" snapped. "If you're too cowardly to undertake the job, though, say so at once, and I will get some one else. Two hundred and fifty dollars is not to be snapped up so easily every day."

"Cap'n's right, pard," decided one of the others, "an' we don't want ter lose th' shekels; so come on."

"Are you sure you understand?" the "saint" asked again.

"Yes, we onderstands it all kerrect."

"Well, then, be off with you, and see that you don't fail."

The two villains started upon their mission, and then the "saint" turned to his companion and added:

"And now, for our part in the game."

"Well, what are your plans?"

This man had not spoken before, but it did not surprise the listeners to recognize his voice as that of Karlo Kenton, the "parson."

"I will tell you my plans," the "saint" an-

swared, "but we will have to be guided a great deal by circumstances."

"When our man begins to howl and shoot, and the men from the jail run to where he is, there will be a great uproar: and the citizens, thinking there is something wrong at the jail, will flock out in a body."

"Then as soon as Ben Bantam leaves his house, as he surely will, we'll rush in and carry off the two girls."

"That's about all we can arrange, for as I said, we will have to let circumstances govern us."

"Come on." And they, too, moved away.

"Great horned toads!" ejaculated Red-eye Jim, as soon as the men were gone. "S'pose we was tied up in that 'ar old cabin now, pard, whar would we be?"

"We would be in a bad fix, and no mistake."

"Wal, I ruther reckon we would! I kin jest tell ye what it is, pardner; I'm yer friend to th' core in this heur game, an' don't ye fergit it. I've seen enough o' them p'izen critters, now."

"Well," said Dan, "come on, and we will take a hand in this deal ourselves."

"I'm with ye," Red-eye responded, promptly; and the two left the shadow of the old shanty and followed the "s.int" and the "parson."

Ten minutes soon passed away, and then of a sudden a volley of pistol-shots was heard, followed by a series of yells, hoots and howls that fairly astonished the natives.

The guardsmen at the old cabin spring to their feet instantly, weapons in hand.

"What in th' name o' snakes be that?" each asked the others.

"Give it up!" was the reply.

And then came the general exclamation:

"Let's see what it are!"

They had all stood undecided for a moment, but now away they rushed to learn the cause of such an uproar.

Barely had they left their posts, when out from the deep shadows at the rear of the cabin came a human form, holding in one hand a gleaming knife.

Rapidly yet stealthily the man advanced, in a half-stooping manner, to the broken window.

Reaching it, he put his knife between his teeth and climbed as silently as possible into the room.

About the same time that this would-be murderer disappeared into the cabin, one of the guardsmen, who had suddenly realized that it would hardly do for all of them to desert their watch, left his companions and hurried back to the temporary jail.

And it was lucky that he did so, in one respect.

As soon as the hired assassin entered the cabin, he whispered:

"Hist! Whar be ye? I've come ter give ye a chance ter git out."

Getting no reply, he began to feel his way around to find his intended victims.

The room was as dark as Erebus, but he quickly explored it, and great was his surprise when he found that the prisoners had escaped.

"Wal," he muttered, "it's mighty queer, anyhow. I wonder how an' when they got out? But this is no place fer me, an' I'd better be a-gettin' out afore them 'ar pesky watchmen git back."

He turned toward the window to retreat the way he had come, but there was a surprise in store for him.

He had made a little noise, just loud enough to attract the attention of the lone guardsman, and when he thrust his head out to see if his way was clear, he suddenly found himself confronted by the guardsman, with a revolver staring him in the face.

"Don't ye move a ha'r's breadth!" the guardsman cautioned; "fer if ye do, ye'll be a dead man in jest no time! Who be ye, anyhow?"

"Say, don't be rough on a feller," he begged.

"I was in heur when th' pris'ners was put in, an' I thought I'd take this chance fer gettin' out. Let me go, won't ye, an' say nothin' about it?"

"Nary a time I won't!" was the answer he got. "You jest stay right whar ye be, er else I'll drill a hole inter yer cabeeza that ye kin stick yer thumb into!"

"But what d'ye want ter hold me fer? I ain't done nothin'."

"Sure o' that?"

"In course I be! I was in heur asleep in ther corner, an'—"

"Hold on, now, that's jest whar ye lie! Say, Mr. Disco Dan," calling to the prisoner he supposed to be within; "be ye thar all safe?"

Of course there was no reply.

"Cuss ye!" the guardsman then cried, "I believe you've been up to some devil work heur, an' I'll soon see! Don't ye move an inch, now, er I'll plug ye."

And then the lone guardsman fired his revolver and shouted for his companions to come to his assistance.

He half-feared that this man had killed the prisoners.

Little did he imagine the true state of affairs.

Meanwhile, the three other guardsmen had gone on to ascertain the cause of all the shooting and yelling.

And they soon came upon the man who was doing it.

The fellow seemed to be royally drunk, and was blazing away regardlessly.

And the way he was howling was enough to make the night hideous.

He played well his part; and even after the guardsmen had shouted to him, he continued to reel around recklessly, and to shoot and yell to the best of his ability.

"What th' merry doost ails ye; anyhow?" one of the guardsmen asked.

"'Ello, pard, 'ello!" cried the man. "I've—hic—I've shot th' moon!"

"Shot th' moon! Why, you blamed jackass, thar ain't no moon ter-night!"

"I know it, pard—hic—I know it; I've—hic—I've shot it!"

"Oh! go to blazes! You're drunk!"

By this time half the town was aroused, and men came hurrying to the scene from every direction.

And then of a sudden the three guardsmen heard shots and shouts in the direction of the old cabin, and they started back on a run.

When they arrived there, great was their surprise to find their comrade holding the "drop" on a fellow who had his head thrust out the window, unable to get out and afraid to draw back.

At first they took it to be Red-eye Jim, trying to escape; but their fellow guardsman quickly explained that it was not he; and when he also told them that he could not hear a sound from the other prisoners, the excitement ran high.

Leaving the one to guard the man at the window, the others opened the door and went in.

One of them had a torch, which he had previously lighted, and by its light the interior of the cabin was plainly revealed.

And it also revealed to the thunderstruck custodians of the temporary jail the fact that their prisoners were not there.

They were thunderstruck.

Where could their prisoners be?

Had this man set them free? They certainly believed so.

The villain was still standing with his head sticking out of the window, where the cold muzzle of a revolver caressed it gently.

He held his knife firmly grasped in his right hand, and was a bad-looking customer; but when three more revolvers were pressed against his body from behind, and he was called upon to surrender, he did so at once.

He allowed his knife to drop to the floor, and in a few moments more he occupied the position so lately held by Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim.

The news of the escape of the two prisoners flew like wild-fire all over the town, and in a wonderfully short time Domino Divide was all astir and in a fever of excitement.

The guardsmen, and also their new prisoner, were plied with questions, but no satisfactory information could be gained.

The new prisoner finally acknowledged that he had "entered th' cabin with th' intention of settin' th' pris'ners free," but had found them already gone.

But he was not believed.

All thought that he had set them free, and that had the guardsman who returned arrived a moment sooner, he could have prevented their escape. As it was, he got there just in time to nab the last one in the act of getting out.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TABLES TURNED.

AND while all was excitement around the "jail," events of no less importance were transpiring at the other end of the town.

When the first of the pistol-shots and wild shouts were heard, Ben Bantam was among the first of the citizens to hasten to the scene of the excitement.

Barely had he gone, when his wife stepped outside the door to satisfy her curiosity by listening.

And so deeply interested was she, that she

failed to discover two dark forms that crept slowly and silently toward her, and she knew nothing of their presence until they sprung upon her.

A hand was clapped over her mouth, and powerful hands laid hold upon her in no gentle manner.

Desperately did she struggle, but all in vain; she was soon helpless in the hands of her assailants, and in a moment more was securely gagged and bound.

The assailants were two men, both of whom wore masks of black cloth.

Silently they carried the woman into the house and laid her on the floor, and then they as silently began to look around for the room where the twin sisters were; and, as soon as they had located the door, they put out the light and advanced toward it.

Meanwhile, at the first sound of alarm, the girls had sprung to their feet.

"What can it be, sister?" the blind girl asked. "I suppose it is some drunken fight, such as we have heard so often," the other answered.

"I do not know why it is, Edith," said Bessie, "but I am all a-tremble. I fear that something is about to happen to us."

"You must not give way to your feelings so," said Edith. "I fear your adventure of to-night has completely unstrung your nerves."

At that moment there came a knock at their door.

"Who is there?" Edith asked.

"It's me, Mrs. Bantam," was the answer, although the voice did not sound natural; "you had better get up and dress, my dears, for th' rioters may come this way at any moment."

"We are already dressed," said Edith; and she could not help wondering at the change of tone and language in the speaker.

Of course it was none other than one of the men who had just made a prisoner of Mrs. Bantam, and while he was thus speaking, he gently tried the door.

Finding it secured only with the latch, he flung it suddenly open, and the two villains sprung into the room.

One glance in the semi-darkness showed them that the girls were indeed up and dressed, and that they were standing near the window; and without a single word of warning the two rascals sprung at them.

There was one faint scream, a brief struggle, and then the two girls were soon bound and gagged as Mrs. Bantam had been.

Then the two men lifted them up and bore them away in their arms.

When they left the cabin they hurried out of town in the direction of the Poor-man's Find Mine, and were soon lost to sight.

That is to say, they were lost to sight of the town; but there were two men who followed them like veritable sleuths, eagerly watching their every move.

And those two men were Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim.

"Shall we mount 'em, pard, an' give 'em a little moosic in ther key of high G?" Red-eye asked in a cautious whisper, as they crept silently along behind their game.

"No," Dan answered, "let them go on. They are playing right into my hands, now, and I will give them plenty of rope."

"Where do you think they will take the girls?"

"Wal, there is an old cabin a short ways up th' hill back of th' mine," Red-eye replied; "an' I reckon mebbey they'll take 'em up thar."

"Very well. We will let them get up there, and then we will take a hand in the game."

Carefully they followed the two bold rascals who were thus carrying the orphaned girls away from the town, and not for an instant did they pause or allow the trail to grow cold.

The way in the direction of the Poor-man's Find Mine lay up-hill, and three or four times the abductors had to stop to rest; and at such times Disco Dan and Red-eye Jim would drop to the ground and remain perfectly motionless until they heard or saw their game moving on again.

Below them in the town they could hear a great hum of voices, and could see a hundred torches flashing hither and thither, and they knew that their escape was known.

"They'll look a long time afore they'll find us, pard, I'm thinkin'," said Red-eye, during one of their forced pauses.

"I think they will," was Disco's response. "They should have kept us when they had us; it wasn't our fault that we got away."

This was said in such a way that it struck Red-eye Jim as being particularly funny, and ere he knew it he had laughed out aloud.

Only one short laugh it was, though, for instantly Disco put his hand over his mouth with no gentle force.

"Thunder, pard, that slipped me afore I thought!" the "cyclone" muttered in apology.

"Well, you want to be careful what you're doing. I shouldn't wonder if they heard you." And Dan listened attentively for a moment.

"They did, as sure as fate!" he exclaimed, an instant later. "One of them is coming back this way."

"I'll be hanged if you ain't got sharp ears!" Red-eye exclaimed, in a whisper. "I didn't hear anything, an' that's a fact."

"One is coming all the same, and we must get out of sight. Come, get off the trail as far as you can, and don't make a sound in doing it."

Quickly they drew aside from the main trail, and lay down at full length behind some small rocks and bushes a short distance away.

Nor were they any too soon, for barely had they concealed themselves when one of the men passed by, revolver in his hand.

A short way beyond them he went, and then he stopped and returned, muttering to himself.

Disco Dan and Red-eye did not move, and they were not discovered.

"It is strange," they heard the man mutter; "for I could swear that I heard a human voice."

When he rejoined his companion the two started on, and then our friends rose from their concealment and followed them as before.

Passing the Poor-man's Find, they continued on for a short distance further, and then they turned abruptly into a trail that turned away from the main road at right angles.

As soon as they left the main road they put the girls down and allowed them to walk, but still kept a tight hold upon them.

What the poor girls suffered, can perhaps be imagined, and it seemed hard for Disco Dan not to rescue them at once; but he was near enough to protect them from bodily harm, and since the villains were playing their game right into his hands, he wanted to give them time to run the full length of their rope.

"Where are they going?" Dan asked of Red-eye, when he found they had turned into the other path. "Is this the way to the old cabin you spoke of?"

"Yes," Jim replied, "this is th' trail, pard, an' that's whar they're goin', fer sure."

"Well, we will be with them, I guess. The more the merrier, you know."

Just then there came a momentary interruption in the advance of the party ahead.

Edith, hearing her blind sister sobbing behind her, despite the cruel gag that had been forced into her mouth, stopped short and allowed Bessie to run against her, to let her know that they were still in each other's company, in spite of their misfortunes.

But that was unnecessary, had Edith known it, for Bessie's quick ears had detected her sister's step the moment she was put down to walk.

"Come on, my lady!" exclaimed her brutal captor, as he gave her arm a jerk. "Let us have no foolishness, now, or it will be all the worse for you." And he hurried her roughly on.

Disco Dan heard the words, and his blood fairly boiled.

"How much further is it to that cabin, Jim?" he asked.

"Only a leetle ways now, pard," was the reply.

"Well, get your revolvers out and ready for business, and come on. We must put a stop to this affair."

"All right, pard; out they is," the "cyclone" responded. "I'm all ready for the fun, so lead right on."

In a few moments more the old cabin was reached by the villains, and a few hasty strides then took the two friends forward.

One of the masked men was just in the act of unlocking the door, and the rescuers were not discovered until they were actually upon them.

Then Disco Dan exclaimed:

"Up with your hands, you human devils, or I will drop you in your tracks!"

With angry oaths of surprise, chagrin, and dismay the two rascals sprang back a step, and attempted to draw their weapons, but another word of warning from the sport caused them to think better of it, and their hands went up.

"Now, pard," said Dan, "you step forward and snatch those masks from their faces, and we will see who they are, although we know them well enough as it is. Take their weapons from them, first, though."

Red-eye obeyed.

He first removed the men's revolvers and knives from their pockets, and then he removed their masks; and lo! Barton Barker, the "saint," and Karlo Kenton, the "parson," stood forth confessed.

CHAPTER XVI.

DRAWING THE CIRCLE.

"JUST as I thought," Disco Dan remarked, as he peered into the faces of his two prisoners.

And he added:

"The jig is up, my beauties, and you are my prisoners."

"Jim, secure their hands."

"How in Hades did you two escape?" the "saint" demanded, unable to repress his curiosity.

"Oh! easily enough," Dan replied. "As I told your precious friend, the 'parson,' this evening, I have as many lives as a cat. When your hired assassin came to kill us, he found we had flown."

"What hired assassin? What are you talking about?"

"Oh! that game will not carry you any further, my man, for you have reached the end of your rope."

"We shall see about that."

Red-eye Jim had by this time tied their hands securely; then Disco Dan released the two girls from their cruel bonds.

"How can we ever repay you for the great services you have rendered us this night?" Edith exclaimed.

"By saying nothing about it," Dan answered. "I am thankful that I have been able to be of service to you; and now I suppose you would like to be conducted back to the town, would you not?"

"Indeed, yes, sir."

"Very well, I will arrange to have you taken back at once."

"How can we ever thank you?"

Disco Dan felt that he could trust Red-eye Jim to a certain extent, but no further. To leave him to guard the prisoners while he escorted the twin sisters back to the town, he dared not, for Red-eye might be induced to turn against him, under promises of rich reward, and allow the villains to escape.

Nor did he care to trust him to conduct the girls back to the town in his stead.

There was no choice in the matter, though, and he had to allow Red-eye to play that part.

"Jim, can you disguise yourself?" he asked.

"What fer?" the "cyclone" inquired.

"To take these young ladies back to Ben Bantam's house, and then find Ben and bring him up here, without danger of being recognized."

Red-eye thought perhaps he might do it, if Dan would help him, and so they undertook the task.

Dan cut the man's beard all off as close as possible, having only a knife to do it with; made a slight change in his attire; and then told him to change his voice and walk with a limp, and he thought he would pass all right.

"And now, miss," Dan said, turning again to Edith Baker, "may I have a few words with you in private?"

"Certainly you may," the girl's sweet lips answered; and she stepped with him a short distance away from the others. "What is it you wish?"

"Are you armed?" Dan asked.

"Yes," Edith replied, "I am. I always carry a revolver, sir."

"Very well," said Dan. "This man who will conduct you back to Mr. Bantam's house is something of a rascal at heart, and if he should make one treacherous move, do not hesitate to shoot him. I think, though, he will do his part all right, but I tell you this to put you on your guard."

"Thank you, sir; I shall watch him."

"He may be all right, and I hope he is. He has promised to serve me faithfully, but I do not feel free to trust him far out of my sight."

"When you get to Mr. Bantam's, you please tell him that I want to see him here at once, and that Red-eye Jim will conduct him to me."

"This must be said strictly in private, and Bantam must leave the town unobserved."

"I shall prepare a little surprise party for this town of Domino Divide, and shall spring it upon the citizens in The Den before to-morrow night."

"You intend to sing there to-morrow night, do you not?"

"Such was our intention, sir."

"Well, please be there, for what I shall have to say will be of interest to you."

"If Red-eye Jim should desert you and 'take to the woods,' as the saying is, let him go; and you tell Mr. Bantam where to find me."

"I understand, sir, and will do as you request."

"I would accompany you myself," Dan explained; "but I dare not trust that man to guard my prisoners."

"I see how it is, perfectly," the girl said. "And now we will go."

And again thanking Dan for what he had done for them, the two girls, guided by Red-eye Jim, set out for town.

Disco Dan turned his attention to his prisoners.

To record the conversation of the following ten or twenty minutes is next to impossible, for we are nearing the end of our allotted space. Our closing chapter, however, will make all plain, and the reader's imagination will lead him to guess what it naturally must have been.

We will say, though, that when Disco Dan made himself known to them, they wilted at once and begged for mercy.

They offered to give him every cent they possessed, if he would only allow them a chance to escape.

But Dan was firm, and their prayers were all in vain.

Meanwhile, Red-eye Jim was proving himself faithful to his trust, and in due time the twin sisters were restored to the care of Mrs. Bantam.

Ben was found in the house, he having just returned and released his wife from her more than uncomfortable predicament; and he was just on the point of going out again to alarm the town and organize a search for the two girls.

As it was, the girls were again safe beneath his roof, without the public being aware of their adventure.

Full explanations were soon made, and while the town was still in a state of great excitement over the escape of the prisoners, and while the friends of Barker and Kenton were searching for them, Ben set out with Red-eye to go to the old cabin where Disco Dan was awaiting him.

"What I would like to know," Ben remarked as they went along, "is how you an' th' sport got out o' th' jail?"

Red-eye explained it all to him, and added:

"Ye kin jest set it down fer fact, Ben Bantam, that this heur Disco Dan is a whole he-hoss on wheels, an' no mistake!"

And Ben exclaimed:

"By ginger, Red-eye, I believe ye!"

When they arrived at the old cabin, there was a long conversation between Ben and Disco Dan, after which Ben returned to the town, while Dan, Red-eye Jim and the prisoners remained at the old cabin.

The next day was a red-letter day for Domino Divide.

An air of mystery hung over the place, such as the town had never before known.

The coming of Disco Dan, on the previous night, had seemed to be the signal for the town to get right up and turn itself inside out, as some one there expressed it.

And where was that cool sport now?

Where was Red-eye Jim?

How had they managed to get out of jail, if not set free by the man now held prisoner?

Where were the "parson" and the "saint?"

Very little work was done that day, and The Den Saloon did a good stroke of business.

Barry Barleycorn did not have a great deal to say, and it was noticed that he was a little pale at times.

Once during the day, when a crowd in the saloon cheered him up a little, he ventured to say:

"Well, boys, wherever the 'Daisy Dude' is now, I've got his revolvers and cane to remember him by."

"Th' deuce ye have!" some one exclaimed.

"Yes, I have, fer sure. You know I put 'em right down here in th' closet, when they took 'em away from him last night; an' Red-eye Jim's along with 'em."

"So ye did!" some one else cried out. "Trot 'em out, Barry, an' let's see 'em."

"All right, I will," said Barry, and he stooped down and opened the door of the little closet to get them.

But great was his surprise to find them gone.

"Boys," he gasped, "by heavens they're gone!"

"Gone!"

"As sure as I'm tellin' you!"

There was another mystery ripe for debate.

Where could the arms be? Who had taken them?

And it was a busy day for Ben Bantam.

Had any one watched him, he would have

been seen to hold long conversations with a great many of the best citizens of the town; and in parting, there was in every case a firm shaking of hands, as though some measure had been agreed upon, and a compact entered into.

And so passed the day away.

When night came again, The Den was crowded early, for the fame of the orphaned sisters had spread, and everybody wanted to hear them sing.

And while the crowd awaited their coming, the exciting events of the previous night were talked over and over again.

No trace of the escaped prisoners had been discovered, nor had the "parson" and the "saint," or either of them, been seen.

Their sudden and strange disappearance, and their non-return, were topics for general debate. And they were freely discussed, as may be imagined.

Almost every one present had some theory or other to advance, but no one hit upon the true explanation of the mystery.

At a seasonable hour the twin sisters entered the saloon, in company with Ben Bantam, and proceeded to a little platform at one end of the room, which had been built for them under Ben's directions.

The girls were cheered as soon as they made their appearance, and immediately on reaching their place at the end of the room, they acknowledged the greeting by bowing to their audience.

And then they began their entertainment.

If their singing of the previous evening had charmed their hearers, what could be said of it now, when they were perfectly fresh and full of spirit for their work?

Song after song they sung, and more than once did the tears roll down the bronzed cheeks of some of the rough men, when some plaintive air touched their hearts and reminded them of home and happier days.

The human heart is the same, no matter whether it beats in the breast of a denizen of the wild West, or of a citizen of the metropolis; its better feelings can be brought to light, if only the right chord is touched.

The sisters had just ended one of their prettiest songs, when, to the almost paralyzing surprise of all present, into the saloon walked Disco Dan.

He was toying with his mustache, and twirling his cane between his fingers, and as he advanced into the room, he began to sing:

"Oh! I'm a dude—a daisy dude,
A sport of the very first water;
Oh! I'm a pet, as you can bet,
And I'm—"

But he came to a very abrupt halt, snatched his revolvers to light, and cried:

"Hold on! citizens, hold on, now! Just keep calm. I'm a pilgrim stranger here, as I told you last night; but I'm white, citizens, clear through and through. Don't go off at half-cock, now, before you hear what I've got to say."

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

It was to the almost paralyzing surprise of all present, as we have said, that Disco Dan made his appearance.

For a few moments no one moved; and then of a sudden, with one impulse, half the people within the room reached for their weapons.

And then it was that Dan snatched forth his revolvers and covered the crowd.

"Keep perfectly cool, citizens," he added, "for there is no reason why you should excite yourselves, I assure you."

"I have come in here to make a short public address, and I hope you will lend me your attention."

"With your permission I will mount this table." And without waiting for any reply, the sport sprang lightly upon a table near the wall, faced the crowd, and continued:

"As I told you last night, my name is Dan Dale; but instead of being simply the flash sport my appearance would indicate, I am in truth a San Francisco detective."

"Detective Dale, th' grect Frisco sleuth?" some one exclaimed.

"Exactly so."

"Great heavens! boys, thar's no wonder he 'scaped last night! Ye'd mought ez well 'a' tried ter hold chain lightnin'!"

"I want to tell you what it is that brings me here," Dan went on.

"About three years ago there was a gambling palace on H— street, San Francisco, which was owned by two men named Jameson and Smith and managed by one Barry Barleycorn."

Barry Barleycorn, the proprietor of The Den was standing behind his bar, and his face assumed the hue of death.

"Yes," said the detective, nodding in his direction, "you're the gentleman."

"About three years ago, too," he went on, "Jameson and Smith suddenly sold out and disappeared, taking their man Barleycorn with them."

"That was all right, so far as it went, and nobody cared; but about two months ago the skeleton of a man was found in a secret closet in the old palace, and then the police became interested in the whereabouts of Jameson, Smith and Barleycorn at once."

"I was detailed to hunt them up, and last night I found them here."

"And not only did I find them, but I learned who the murdered man was, and have solved the whole mystery."

"Now, before I proceed further, I want to introduce my prisoners to you."

As the detective spoke he gave a short, sharp whistle, and into the saloon came four well-known citizens, leading Karlo Kenton and Barton Barker, who were handcuffed together.

"Gentlemen," said Disco Dan, "allow me to introduce Mr. Charles Jameson and Mr. Walker Smith, alias Barton Barker, the 'saint,' and Karlo Kenton, the 'parson.'"

The surprise of the crowd may be imagined.

"Furthermore," said the detective, "this man Jameson—Barker, the 'saint,' or whatever you will—is none other than Midnight Dan, the great road-agent."

"You see he does not deny it, for my proofs are positive."

"Almost all the gold that you honest men have shipped from here has found its way into this villain's pocket."

A howl of rage was heard at once.

"Let me warn you, now," Dan said, "not to attempt to take my prisoners from me to lynch them, for that I will not allow; and let me warn the followers of Midnight Dan, if any are present, not to try to rescue their leader."

"You can see how well I am backed," and he waved his hand at those immediately around him.

Instantly about twenty men turned and faced the rest of the crowd, revolvers in hand.

These men had been selected by Ben Bantam, during the day, and they understood well their part.

"You see," said Dan, "that I am not alone."

And then he resumed:

"About fifteen years ago, one Barton Baker came out here from Ohio."

"Here he made the acquaintance of these two men, and trusted them fully."

"The three prospected together for several years; but at last Jameson and Smith struck a little streak of luck, and opened the palace on H— street, San Francisco."

"Baker continued prospecting."

"He kept his former comrades posted in regard to his whereabouts from time to time, and all letters from his wife were sent through their care."

"Three years ago, or a little more, Baker made a ten-strike; and as soon as he could make his claim secure, he intended to start for home."

"He put up at the palace kept by Jameson & Smith, whenever he visited San Francisco; and on the night before, as he intended to start for home the next day, he disclosed to his old pals the great hit he had made, and displayed his papers to them."

"Barton Baker never left that house alive. He was murdered that night, by an assassin hired by these two devils in human form."

"The man who committed the crime was a ruffian named Bill Greenly. He was once a great chum in crime of Red-eye Jim's."

"When Greenly killed poor Baker, he took the deed of the mine from his pocket and would not surrender it to his worthy employers. Instead, he held it constantly over their heads, and drew upon their purse whenever he would."

"Greenly is now dead; but before he died he disclosed his secret to Red-eye Jim, gave him the deed, and Red-eye has worked the claim ever since."

"You can now understand why Red-eye Jim had such power over these men."

"It is not necessary for me to go into the details of all that happened here last night, for you were here and saw everything."

"I must tell you, though, that these two young ladies who have been singing for you are the children of Barton Baker, and the rightful heirs to his property; and that property is—

the POOR-MAN'S FIND MINE, of this town."

The cheer that shook the building was deafen-

ing, and all eyes were turned upon the fair young girls, who were silently weeping.

The detective went on, as soon as he could make himself heard, and exposed the whole dark crime.

He told why Jameson had taken the name—"Barton Barker," and how he had intended making the deed read "Barker" instead of "Baker," whenever he should be fortunate enough to get hold of it; and all the other points of interest.

He also explained how he and Red-eye had escaped; how they had recovered their weapons; how they had overheard the plan to raise an excitement and murder him and Red-eye Jim; and how the poor girls had been carried off, but rescued again ere any harm could come to them.

In conclusion he said:

"Murder will come out. The events of the past night were but the successful working-out of the will of Him who has said—'Vengeance is mine!' I am but a humble instrument in His hands."

Disco Dan was successful in getting his prisoners to San Francisco, where, after a fair trial, they suffered the dread penalty for their dark crime.

Red-eye Jim and the man who had crept into the old cabin to murder him and the detective, were both witnesses for the State.

Barry Barleycorn, too, turned against his employers, but as his was not accepted as State's evidence, he was sent to prison for a long term as an accessory.

The two girls, Edith and Bessie Baker, were recognized as the lawful heirs of the "Poor-man's Find," and they gained possession of their property without trouble.

Ben Bantam is now superintendent of the mine, and two of his best men are Billy Barber and James Jumper—the latter being "Red-eye Jim."

Dan Dale and Edith Baker fell victims to the wiles of Cupid, and are now happy as husband and wife.

Bessie, the blind sister, is under treatment in Paris, and it is to be hoped that her sight may be restored.

Domino Divide still flourishes, and is now quite a city, rejoicing in a new name. The Den has given place to a large hotel, and many other changes have taken place, but still there are many old-time citizens there who love to recall the old title the town once bore, and to tell of the bygone times. And no event pleases their hearers more than the adventures there of Disco Dan, the Daisy Dude.

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